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LAND AHEAD

VOL. II.

LAND AHEAD

A Novel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "LITTLE LADY LORRAINE," "OUR NEXT NEIGHBOUR," ETC.

Human soul
Must rise from individual to the whole.
Self-Love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre moved, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads;
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace;
His country next, and next all human race;
Wide and more wide, th' o'erflowings of the mind
Take every creature in, of ev'ry kind;
Earth smiles around, with boundless bounty blest,
And Heaven beholds its image in his breast.—POPE'S *Essay on Man.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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LAND AHEAD!

CHAPTER I.

Direct not him whose way himself will choose;
'Tis breath thou lack'st, and that breath wilt thou lose.
Richard II., Act ii. Sc. 1.

And for this once my will shall stand for law.
Third Part of Henry VI., Act iv. Sc. 1.

"So you see, Walpole, you have come just in time."

Sir Gilbert was propped up in bed, and was looking anxiously at Mr. Mortimer, who was seated at the window, looking now at the old baronet's face, now turning away to the old cedars waving to and fro outside in the light summer breeze and to the stretch of park beyond.

"But as you have heard from that fellow, I

don't know that my news is of very much use after all."

"Tudor is a very clever fellow."

"Very. Let me see his letter. He told me he should not meddle."

"He tells me he has postponed it till absolutely obliged."

"It was because he would not meddle that I came."

"And so now you will tell me all about it."

"You see I am not sure he will marry the girl."

"Dudley marry the girl! Of course he won't. I should think not. But is he thinking of it?"

"Ye—es. I should say on the whole that he is thinking of it."

A strong expletive from Sir Gilbert and a long silence followed.

"What is she like, Walpole?"

"Lovely girl; clever too; but no money."

"A German wife!"

"Mother's English."

"The boy's a fool."

"I am not sure that the girl would have him."

Sir Gilbert's eyes rested on Mr. Mortimer's face.

"Good heavens! then she must be a worse fool than he is."

"She likes some one else; but the mother's sharp."

"But there's Tudor."

"Oh yes; Tudor has told lies enough to reach from here to Christmas to put her off the scent; but what is Tudor against a woman?"

"The boy must be an ass."

"And he has an ass's obstinacy about this."

"Look here, Mortimer; it shall not be," and the old man leaned forward in the bed. "It would kill me. It shall not be. Look! leave me now; go away now. Go and make friends with that woman, or take a turn in the gardens and report to me. And take Tudor's letter to look at. I shall have made up my mind by and by."

Mr. Mortimer rose and took the letter, and then, with something of compunction for the suffering of his old friend, stayed a moment by the bed-side.

"I say, Vane, don't worry yourself, or make yourself worse over this. These things always come right, you know, somehow. You and I always got out of our worst scrapes you know.

And if we didn't, it was, you know, that Providence meant we should not."

"Good heavens, Mortimer! these are just the scrapes a young man does not get out of. He had better, far better, have a mill-stone tied round his neck."

"I don't know that, I don't know that. She's a clever woman, and might keep him straight."

"Keep him straight! Just make ducks and drakes of the property, and have an incursion of her vile, smoking relatives all over the place; with their *Achs*, and their *Himmels*, and their *Jas;* all living here, and dragging down the old family name to I don't know what."

"Don't excite yourself, Gilbert; don't! you'll only make yourself worse."

"Worse! why, I am not ill. This has cured me. Fortunate I am still alive; there is still time to save it. I never felt so well."

"Think it over quietly, Gilbert."

Mr. Mortimer moved away.

"I say, Walpole, do you know what I meant to make of that boy?"

He stretched out of bed, pushing back the curtains as he called after him. Mr. Mortimer

stopped on the threshold and gently closed the door again, for he had opened it.

"Ah! dreams, my dear Vane, dreams. The young men now-a-days——"

"Are good-for-nothing, idle, degenerate dogs, with no sort of pride or ambition in them. I meant, Walpole — I meant, Walpole," but his voice was choked, and he fell back exhausted.

"I know, Gilbert, I know."

Mr. Mortimer was at his bed-side again now.

"L'homme propose, Vane, et Dieu dispose."

But Sir Gilbert waved him away. Was he ashamed that his old friend should see the tear that trembled on his eye-lid?

As Mr. Mortimer crossed the hall on his way to the gardens he met old Douglas the butler. The old man looked very sorrowful.

"It won't be for long, Mr. Walpole; it won't be for long."

"I suppose not, I suppose not," he answered, trying to steady his voice. In truth it was a shock to him. The ravages of illness he had seen certainly, but still Sir Gilbert seemed so full of vitality, he had not realized it like this.

"You ought to have come sooner, Mr. Walpole."

Mr. Mortimer crushed Mr. Tudor's letter in his pocket, and looked on the floor.

"I was abroad, Douglas; a long way off, Douglas."

"Oh, sir. Indeed, sir. Don't let me keep you, sir." He held the hall-door open for him, but there was something reproachful in the old man's manner. "We all wanted a friend, sir, sadly here."

"I know, Douglas, I know."

Then he passed out, bare-headed, with his hat in his hand. As he turned it over it brought back to him a thousand memories; he had bought it at Sonnenthal for shade. Margaret had gone shopping with him for it. Now what a renegade he seemed. Her face seemed to haunt him remorsefully just now.

"Poor little girl! sweet girl!"

A pleasant thought in connection with her seemed to cross his mind as he looked at the grand old house and its gardens and the sweep of park beyond.

Mr. Tudor's letter fell on the gravel walk, and he, unconscious, turned into a summer-house close at hand.

"I am a renegade," said he, and he shut his eyes to think it out better.

Meanwhile Sir Gilbert Vane alone in his room was also trying to think it out better. Passionate indignation, affection, and disappointment were striving for the mastery in his heart. Had not he loved Dudley? had not he striven to guide him from his childhood? had not he educated him, and been ambitious for him, and endeavoured to implant dreams of ambition in him? When was the seed to bear fruit? was this all the return he should get? what now would become of the property, of the family name? was Dudley really a "ne'er-do-well"? or was he at best a clod—one who understood merely how to exist, not to live? A homely German wife, a tender-hearted, miserable woman thinking merely of her domestic hearth and household matters was in fact quite the last wife for him. Sir Gilbert could not bear it. It was ruin to all his dreams, to all his intentions. And yet was the boy so stupid? had not Sir Gilbert's teachings made any way at all? would Dudley really run his head against a brick wall like this? And then Sir Gilbert fondly thought of all their conversations, of all the maxims he had tried to inculcate, of the worldly prudence he had preached, and of the higher aspirations at which he had hinted. Oh

no; surely if he could only be reminded of all this, if it were only put before the boy in a proper light, he must come to his senses, and all might be right yet. Then he tried to raise himself in bed, to look out on the park he loved so well, but the mental excitement had been too great for him; he was weaker, and he fell back exhausted. It was not till an hour after, that a footstep roused him at last.

"Gilbert, my poor darling, how is it now?"

There was no answer.

"Poor dear, he is weaker."

The wary footstep came nearer.

"My poor Gilbert, would you like anything?"

"Go away."

"Eh? not to-day? What?"

"How did you get in? Is Douglas there?"

"No; did you want him?"

"Yes."

"Gilbert, I want to speak to you. Will you hear me?"

Only silence.

"I hear from Mr. Mortimer that my boy——"

"Bother you and your boy; leave me alone; I can't be disturbed."

When, five minutes after, the faithful Douglas came, a long stream of blood crimsoning the counterpane told a tale. What horror it was for the faithful servant. Having burst a blood-vessel at this stage, would it be possible now ever for Sir Gilbert to return to even a semblance of health?

How much hangs on trifles! Had not Mr. Mortimer closed his eyes so persistently to all mundane things, that he might more closely consider moral and spiritual affairs, Mrs. Vane had learned nothing of Dudley's danger, had not disturbed Sir Gilbert on the unwelcome topic, and he in his turn had not burst his blood-vessel. Health and life now hung by a thread; the flicker of the candle became feebler and feebler.

Thus had it happened.

Mr. Mortimer, silent and immovable within the summer-house, heard a step on the gravel, and looking up, saw Mrs. Vane coming towards him. He had his reasons therefore more than ever for silence and absence of movement. Suddenly there was a stop in the dreaded advance, and warily opening his eyes, he saw the lady stoop and pick up a letter. Instinctively Mr. Mortimer's hand sought his pocket, and

finding there a vacuum, he knew at once what had happened.

"She won't read it," thought he.

But to his horror she read it all.

He watched her face of astonishment, of disgust, and then he closed his eyes again.

She came up to the summer-house swiftly, talking to herself. She thought she was alone. Suddenly she saw him; she stopped abruptly, and abject curiosity and a mean spirit of thirsty revenge opened his eyes for him on her confusion.

They contemplated each other for a moment without speaking. He knew he ought to say he had been asleep, but he could not find generosity sufficient in his heart.

"So I have been confessing myself to you, have I, Mr. Mortimer? I had no idea you were here."

"You were clever enough to find a letter I had lost, Mrs. Vane."

Excuses are useless sometimes.

"You are not very careful with Gilbert's correspondence."

Then she put the letter in his hand.

"I have not read it myself yet."

He half turned away from her as he perused it. How vividly it brought the man and the scenes he had lately left before him as he read. For the moment he was at Sonnenthal again.

"Dear Sir Gilbert,

"When you see the contents of my letter you will easily believe what a severe conflict I have had with myself before I allowed myself to pen it; the most urgent need alone compels me. Affection for my pupil, esteem and respect and the dislike to disturb you, alike hold me back. Duty urges me on. The fact is, my charge, I grieve to say, has become entangled, and is I fear on the eve of contracting a *mésalliance* with a young German girl. Do not imagine that I have been careless or neglectful. For the last month I have spent sleepless nights and anxious days. But his romantic escape from drowning had much to do with it; and then, Sir Gilbert, when we are young—ah, sir, when we are young! I trouble you with no details; my chief anxiety now is to know your wishes. Would you prefer your nephew to be happy in his own way, or in yours? He is passionately *épris*, I warn you; and to stop this will be very difficult;

his nature has depths in it of which lately I have seen strange glimpses. But, Sir Gilbert, if this *mésalliance* should not meet with your approbation (she is a charming, most fascinating girl), why! Tudor to the rescue; and you may rely on me to do all that mortal man can do in such circumstances.

"That this letter is private and confidential of course you understand. I think for the present Mrs. Vane had better not be informed of its subject-matter; it might disturb her needlessly. Also, till we have your intentions plainly signified, also our young people's intentions clearly discerned, silence were best. It is generally wiser to keep people in doubt and unrest about our purposes; we have the example of the heavenly powers to illustrate this.

"I beg a line as speedily as may be convenient, and

"Pray believe me,
"My dear Sir Gilbert Vane,
"Very faithfully yours,
"Owen Tudor."

"Has he answered it?" asked Mr. Mortimer, turning absently to Mrs. Vane, who had been

sitting on the bench beside him while he was reading it.

"How do I know? How should I know? How mean of Gilbert and of you to tell me nothing about it. Am I not the boy's mother, and should I not have been the very first to have been told? And how wicked of you, Mr. Mortimer, to come here and to go straight to Sir Gilbert about it, and to pass me over entirely. Why should any one tell Sir Gilbert at all, even if Dudley has got into any scrape? Isn't he my son, not Sir Gilbert's? And it is destroying his chances for ever."

"I had not the honour of your acquaintance. How could I——"

In truth Mr. Mortimer was becoming confused. Whichever way he turned he seemed to have done wrong. How he wished he had never seen anything or said anything.

"As for a *mésalliance*, you know, Mrs. Vane," said he, rising, "that is all nonsense; Miss Margaret is worth sixty thousand of Dudley."

"What! a penniless German girl! Mr. Mortimer, you must be mad."

"Perhaps I am. I think I am mad. I will go to Sir Gilbert now and see if he has written."

"And I shall write at once to Dudley and to Mr. Tudor, and tell them what I think of their conduct."

"You will only make matters worse, Mrs. Vane; you had much better leave it alone. Take my advice."

Then he went back to the house, and Mrs. Vane went to Sir Gilbert, as we have seen, with the result of the burst blood-vessel, as we have also seen.

It was not till two days after that Sir Gilbert, after much thought and argument and perplexity, accomplished the dictation of the following pithy and laconic note to Mr. Tudor:—

"A Vane cannot bring home a German bride. Get him away, do what you like, but stop it, and the next presentation of the living of Froghambury is yours.

"GILBERT VANE."

"Tudor is a clever man, Walpole. One could not expect him to take trouble without making it worth his while."

But was the old baronet satisfied with this? did he really put his whole trust in Mr. Tudor?

was he going to let the matter rest there? Oh no; Dudley had orders to come home if he wished to see his uncle alive once more; plain and distinct commands that he was not to marry Miss Hoffman on any pretence whatever, while Mrs. Vane was asked daily if she had written a lecture to that fool of a boy.

And even then did he rest?

No; the old lion was not going to lie still while they threw the net over him and sought to catch him in its toils. If death was working with them, he would be before them all and win yet. Even as he got weaker and weaker the battle was going on. What rage he felt against Dudley, what disappointed pride and blighted ambition. Mortimer listened to his wailings and broken exclamations by the hour, and his heart bled for the old man. Was this to be the end of it all—of all his pride, his hopes, his fond dreams?

"I loved the boy, Walpole; I loved him with all his faults, all his idleness. And, Walpole, I have willed everything to him, and now I cannot bear it."

And suddenly one night the thought came to him—

"I will not bear it."

He touched his bell feebly indeed, but the sound gave him determination.

"Douglas, I have a message to write; give me a pen and paper."

Douglas, wondering, did as he was bid.

"Now go, Douglas. I must think. Why, Walpole, are you there?"

"I heard your bell; I thought I could do something perhaps."

"Oh no; it is nothing. But still, as you are there—well, wait a second, I want your promise. I—do you remember, once, years ago, you and Douglas signed my will. This is different, only a promise."

"All right, Gilbert. Don't excite yourself."

"Walpole, I loved that boy."

"I know, I know."

"Douglas, you know Mr. Dudley."

"Yes, sir; he will be home soon."

"Home? wait——"

Then with a feeble hand he traced the following words:—

"*September* 15, 1867.

"I, Gilbert Vane, hereby make my last will and testament. My will is, that if my nephew

Dudley Vane should disgrace himself now or at any future time by marrying one Margaret Hoffman, he is thenceforth disinherited, and can succeed to nothing of mine. By such act of his my former will is rendered null and void. In such case, all my property which should have been his shall go to my cousin Arthur Bunbury, now residing at "The Albany," Piccadilly; who shall take the name of Vane, and Froghambury and the wealth appertaining thereto shall be enjoyed by him and his heirs for ever after. The legacies I have willed in the former will to remain intact.

"*Signed*,

"GILBERT VANE."

"Sign, Walpole," said he, in a low voice, offering him the pen.

"Have you thought? do you mean——"

"It is nothing, Mortimer; don't be afraid. Only just—nothing terrible."

And something like a laugh was heard through the sick room.

So Mortimer signed.

And then Douglas took the pen, and wrote his name below. But neither knew what they had signed.

"Thank you," and he gave his hand to each. "Now I can die happy. I think I shall sleep now. Come to me early, Walpole. Good-night, Douglas."

But he did not sleep. Neither did they. What had they signed? Why had they humoured the old man so? a sick man's fancy often works a world of ruin. What had they done?

As for Gilbert Vane, he held and twisted the paper in his poor feeble fingers and wondered what he should do with it. Had it come to this? had he nothing but revenge left for the youth he had cherished and loved and fostered? Yet how was he to let this child he loved disgrace himself thus? Had he not had Dudley warned, and must he not now be true to his warning? Should he after all burn the paper, and when he were really dead he should not in fact care what became of Froghambury or of the name of Vane.

"And Bunbury is a good man, and a clever man, and a rich man. Think of smoky Germans here, think of German children running all over the place, think of a German Frau, with her harsh gutterals and her homely dress and ways. I cannot bear it. Dudley must be saved."

Presently his eye fell on an antique cabinet

which stood in one corner of the room; it was of curious make and artistic design.

"Ah, the secret drawer," thought he.

But how was he to get there? To him it was as good as miles away. Had not he one person he could trust—not one he dared tell? No; he dared not tell one human being of this piece of vengeance which he had prepared.

By slow and painful degrees, therefore, he strove to reach the cabinet. How long did it take him! Did the pitying angels look down and see what pains a human being will take to save the dearly-loved possessions after the poor body has long decayed and crumbled away? What agony he suffered in mind and body. What energy, what tenacity it required. But at last it was done. Just as the spring yielded to his touch he felt a pang of compunction.

"After all, what is life? I never enjoyed it. Let him enjoy his, and be happy. My seed, his harvest. But no; why should it be? *If* he does it, only *if* he does it—so be it."

So the paper was thrust in, and the drawer closed, the spring struck, and the deed was done.

An hour later, Sir Gilbert had regained his bed,

and then the grey dawn was peering in between the chinks of the shutters.

About eleven o'clock Mrs. Vane sued for admittance.

"Tell him I have good news for him, Douglas."

But Sir Gilbert was much worse to-day. He could not speak; he could only listen.

"It is all over, Sir Gilbert; all stopped. Her father, the Professor, is dead, and they are all leaving Sonnenthal, and we are quite safe."

"Who stopped it?"

"Mr. Tudor; it is all right. He is bringing Dudley back."

"I promised him the living. You must see to it."

He was certainly much worse to-day. The doctors shook their heads over him, and looked very grave.

"The nurse must certainly——"

But he shook his head.

"Walpole may stay."

That night there was a change. There had been a stillness as of death for hours; save for the ticking of the clock on the mantel-piece, and the chimes of the old stable clock outside, the silence had not been broken, when suddenly Mortimer felt the sick man move.

"It—was—that—killed—me, Walpole. The money."

"It will be all right, Gilbert."

"It has been—my death. I—cared—too—much."

A long silence followed.

"Shall I call the others? Let me fetch the doctor."

"No; not yet."

And after awhile he added—

"Just you and I."

The old friends of boyhood together once more.

"Walpole——"

"Yes."

"That will——"

Mortimer bent his head lower.

"That you signed last night is——"

"Yes."

"Is not right."

"No; very well."

"It is wicked."

"Where?"

"There." He pointed to the window. "Destroy it. Dudley is my boy."

"Yes."

Then he made a sign that he wanted to write,

so Mortimer put a pencil between his fingers and held the paper before him. "I do not wish Dudley disinhe—" and then he sank back exhausted.

He fastened his eyes on Mortimer wistfully. Then presently he put his hand up to write again.

"Let him succeed to all," he wrote, and pushed the paper to Mortimer.

"Whatever—happens, he—must—be—happy. He—is—a—good—boy."

"I will look after him."

"Thank you, thank you, Walpole. I have never been happy since we were boys together."

"God bless you, Gilbert."

The dying man's hand was in his still.

"Shall I call the rest now?"

"No; just you and I, and peace, and God. Pray!"

So the old friend knelt beside him and prayed.

The two worldly men came to God thus together at last. As he prayed Mortimer felt the grasp relax and the hand grow colder. When he looked there was a smile on the face, but the spirit had fled.

CHAPTER II.

Then the mortal coldness of the soul like death itself comes down ;
It cannot feel for others' woes, it dare not dream its own ;
That heavy chill has frozen o'er the fountain of our tears,
And though the eye may sparkle still, 'tis where the ice appears.

Byron.

It was long before Margaret could be roused from the stupor of sorrow into which her father's death had thrown her. When indeed she did begin to wake once more to life, the revival of old associations, the recall of old memories brought bitter pangs with them, and it was like one waking to a day of pain and wishing again for the dark hours of night. An exaggerated sense of remorse was ever present with her. She thought she had neglected her father; she thought that if she had not been so busied with her love-affairs, her "imaginary sorrows," as now in her keen grief she called them, if she had been less selfish, that then he would not have died. She thought she had been faithless to the old

affection and deep sympathy existing between them. She thought that she had been careless of the life-long, unvarying kindness he had shown her; she knew she had been his all, and then suddenly she had taken herself away from him, and had left him comfortless; for the sake of younger faces, and for foolish jokes, for bright smiles, and for tender speeches she had done this; just for such false, fleeting gifts she had done it; and now their falsehood had come home to her, and she was reaping as she had sown. When had her father's love, her father's true and loyal sympathy ever failed her? and how had she repaid him for it? for what had she disregarded it?

For Valentin's love! And now was the treasure she had so ardently coveted hers? Her dying father had thought so. But she doubted sorely. And even now, in this hour of bitter need, she almost turned away from that love. It seemed to her as though through it her loss had come upon her. It seemed to her that if Valentin had never come to her she and her father might have been happy together still. Her father had died thinking his place was filled and that Margaret would be happy, but in truth

her spirit turned from all sympathy; she could not yet be comforted; she suffered too acutely to see even Valentin.

The dreary days passed by, and Dudley came, and Valentin came, and Frau Senden came, and Mr. Tudor too, but Frau Hoffman must always give the same answer: "Margaret could see no one."

Two people were very happy at this, and two others were very miserable. Dudley was miserable, Valentin also; but Frau Senden rejoiced, and Mr. Tudor's face expanded daily under a brighter smile as his prospect of the living of Froghambury became surer and surer, and as Dudley's hopes of winning Margaret became fainter.

Had not he written home letter upon letter to poor Sir Gilbert, had not post after post brought tidings of his most successful diplomacy, had not he imposed alike upon Mrs. Vane and even upon Mr. Mortimer, had not he withheld all account of the Professor's demise, till the sudden news of Sir Gilbert's very serious illness had come with a crash of reality upon him, and much alarmed at the chance of losing the living after all, he had told of the death of the Professor, and the small

likelihood there was of Margaret ever listening to Dudley's protestations of attachment, owing to his careful representation?

Sir Gilbert's state, too, did seem to stop all probability of the match, for it immediately became imperatively necessary for the boy to go home; and as Margaret was inexorable, and would receive no adieux or permit him to see her, he left "all hope behind" at Sonnenthal, and started off from the Valley of the Sun with a very heavy heart indeed.

"But, Margot, kindlein, do see him, just for a minute; he is your friend, your tender, devoted, kind friend," urged Mrs. Hoffman.

"No, mother; I have done him quite harm enough. He must never see me again. He must forget me. He will forget me."

"And you, my child?"

"I, mother! Oh, I want to die, that is all."

But there was Valentin. Daily he came to Blumenthal asking after her. Sometimes he brought her flowers, sometimes he saw Frau Hoffman; and the mother marked the tears in his eyes, and wished that Margot would see him. But by and by he grew angry; his heart changed.

Margaret was cruel, faithless, negligent, selfish in her grief.

"He must wait, mother," she had said. "By and by I will see him. If he loves me he will wait. I am not strong enough to see him yet."

She feared to face him yet.

At last, one evening, as she sat at the window looking out on the river, and shielded from view by the flowers, Valentin passed beneath.

He did not see her; he did not even look up; he had no idea she was so near to him. There was something weary, listless, dejected in his step; his head was held low, he was looking on the ground. How different from the bright, triumphant Valentin she had known. Her heart smote her. What was she doing? Was she right to indulge her grief in this way? She looked after him as long as she could, and when her mother came in she was surprised at the change of expression on her daughter's face.

"Why, have you heard, child?"

"What, mother?"

"Oh, I thought you had. There seems more interest, more life in your face than I have seen there for a long time."

A half-conscious blush overspread the sad countenance.

"What could I hear, mother?"

"Only my plan. I thought some one might have told you. Do like it, Margot. Do fall in with it. It is this: I want to go and live in England."

Frau Hoffman was startled with the cry of joy the girl gave.

"Do let us, mother. That would be a fresh, free life. Anything to get away."

"Can you leave it all so easily?"

"I cannot bear it. Every corner, every picture, every flower reminds me of him. Take me away, mother."

"But the others, Margot—Count von Broderode, eh?"

"He will come too, perhaps. Or he will marry Frau Senden, perhaps. At all events then we shall know."

"But, Margot, I think he loves you. He comes so often; he wants to see you so much."

"Does he, mother?"

The tones were so soft Frau Hoffman did not answer, and presently she left Margaret alone.

"If he would come now—just now," sighed Frau Hoffman to herself.

But he did not. There at Sonnenfels he was singing a song with Lotta. If he had only known—— But if there were no *ifs* life would not be the cheat it is, and unhappiness would not be so universal. It was Valentin's last night at Sonnenfels, and Margaret would not say good-bye.

That night Margaret went out on the house-top, and Fritz lay down by her side. The dog seemed all the comfort left to her now. For the first time since her father's death the lights of Sonnenfels tempted her, and shone out as from a castle of enchantment. Was Valentin really thinking of her now? was he sad? was he suffering? was he, above all, true? As she looked at the gathering stars, shining so steadfastly over her head, she longed inexpressibly to know that—just that, Was he true?

A moment later, she went down-stairs to the court-yard, where Gretchen was knitting her stocking at the gate. It was the first time she had been there since her father died. Every step was an arrow in her heart, every step brought her loneliness home to her more forcibly.

"Gretchen, will you do something for me?"

"Surely, Fraulein, surely."

The girl looked at her, surprised. Why had she come down thus?

"Will you take a letter for me to Sonnenfels?"

"Yes, that I will."

And Gretchen smiled with pleasure. Her young mistress was coming back to life.

"You had better take Fritz with you; it is late."

The letter was soon written. It was to Valentin, and it was simple enough.

"Will you come and see me? I have been very selfish. Are you my friend still?

"Always your

"MARGARET."

"Just leave it, Gretchen, that is all."

Lotta's voice rose clear and pure through the room at Sonnenfels; Valentin standing beside her, joining in the song, thought he had never known her so fascinating, so handsome.

"How brilliant, how devoted, how true she is," thought he.

The door opened, and the servant entered with a note.

"For me?" asked Frau Senden, putting out her hand.

Just then, a black form stopped for a second outside the window.

"I thought I saw Fritz; is it Fritz?" exclaimed Valentin.

And out he dashed, considering if it might be Margaret's dog; strangely excited.

The note was Margaret's note for Valentin. Lotta knew the handwriting. She was alone. The temptation was irresistible. She opened it, and read it. Then without a moment's hesitation, she lit the corner of the letter from the candle beside her, and when Valentin returned, he found her carelessly sweeping away some light ashes of burnt paper.

"Was it Fritz?" asked she.

"No. I could not see him. There was nothing."

"Sing to me, Valentin; it is your turn now."

How her fingers trembled; and why was she so pale and so pre-occupied?

But she said it was the music.

"That song of yours always excites me so."

And Valentin, reassured, sang on—sang to forget Margaret, afterwards slept hoping to forget her; and next day, when he passed Blumenthal, he swore in his heart he would sing all his life long, and forget her soon successfully.

CHAPTER III.

When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat;
Yet fool'd with hope, men favour the deceit;
Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay,
To-morrow's falser than the former day;
Lies worse, and while it says we shall be blest
With some new joys, cuts off what we possessed.—*Dryden.*

And meanwhile the weary night wore away with Margaret, and after that the heavy blank days dragged by, and hope deferred made her heart sick, and she lived on, heavily and wondering.

At last she learned that Valentin had gone.

Gone!

She repeated the word wearily to herself, at first without understanding it, at last with some dawning consciousness, and then she felt stunned with the sense of it.

So he was not true. He had not cared. He had been playing with her; amusing himself, shamming sympathy all the time. He was not her friend after all. He certainly never loved

her, though his looks had sworn it a hundred times, and his tongue had softly told it. It was all false. His very thoughts and looks and smiles were false; and if he were false, then for Margaret the whole world was false too.

He had been her world. She knew it now. And he too had known it! He must have seen her worship, her trust, her faith in his strength, in his goodness, in his greatness. And after all, nothing of it existed.

The idol must crumble, must perish. And she, without faith, without trust, without ideal, without —yes, almost without God, for in this He too seemed to have failed her, to have misled her, to have tempted her, she must henceforth be shipwrecked and alone.

Gone!

There is something hopeless, despairing, abandoned in the very cadence of the word. The last part of the word, the dying sound of it is painful, heart-rending.

How weary, footsore, forlorn, and heart-broken she seemed to be now. How blank the path of her future life. And her father had trusted as she had. If now the dead father knew, as she now knew. Did he know? could he see?

Surely if so, he forgave her now; surely now her suffering entitled her to be forgiven for her temporary negligence, and her temporary faithlessness.

If only Valentin had not said he was good, if he had not made her believe in him, had not made her trust him—had not walled himself round with brilliant theories, and if he had not now pulled them all down with him, and left her nothing, then the suffering had been less; if only he had not painted of himself a portrait of strength and intelligence and effort, which portrait had won her highest admiration and her heart, then she had not suffered so much.

But now all had been taken away from her, and she was alone. No friendship, no love, no sympathy more. Then carefully she sought back in her memory for how she could have offended him, how she could have wounded him, but his conduct was inexplicable. Had he thought she had encouraged Dudley Vane? Was it wrong to have taken that last walk with Dudley? But Valentin knew she did not care for Dudley. She had only gone because he did not care, and because he had told her to go.

And then thinking it all over, regrets for the

bright thoughtless past seemed to surge over her in a vain irrepressible crowd. She even began to pity Dudley, and to wonder if he had suffered half as much as she herself suffered now. And later, slowly, it came to her, that now at all events she was alone. She must live alone, be alone, stand alone, bear her life by herself.

"One can make one's life for oneself," said she doubtfully to herself. "I will carve out mine by myself," and at last she said with sudden strength, "I will make my life as beautiful as I can."

Frau Hoffman could understand nothing of her efforts, of her gropings in the dark; she was miserable about her.

"No, my dear," she said to Frau Steingracht, "she does nothing; she seems quite prostrate. I had no idea she cared for her father so much. She cries herself to sleep, and then she wakes to cry again. I don't think she does much else. I must get her away as soon as I can."

So she hurried on the departure for England as fast as she could, and herself felt a sort of buoyancy at leaving Sonnenthal. Margaret had fits of helpfulness, she did all she could, and even Frau Hoffman's eyes filled with tears more than

once as she saw the girl's pathetic efforts over herself and her attempts at usefulness.

"I don't know how we shall live, Kindlein, we shall be very poor, but there will be more satisfaction in making the two ends meet in London than here at Sonnenthal. Bertram has taken a little house for us in Hans Place. I never heard of such a locality. But we must not be particular."

"How I shall like to see London, mother."

In truth she longed for change, for new life, for something to give her new ideas, a fresh impetus, another start.

When at last the day of departure came, and she stood with her mother and Gretchen and Fritz on the steamer, waving adieus to Frau Senden, who had just covered her with kisses as she wept over her, and to Frau Steingracht, who was there with many of the townspeople and many friendly faces—as she saw Blumenthal for the last time, and Sonnenfels smiled down on her also its final adieu, she felt almost glad. An oppression, a weight seemed lifted off her. A new life seemed possible.

Certainly the pleasures of the new life seemed doubtful and uncertain when soon after, on a

dreary October evening, they drove up to the little house in Hans Place. But Margaret was young, and she resolutely pushed her doubts and fears aside, and determined to seek only for possible silver linings behind the clouds.

Strange fitful gleams of light they were breaking through the monotony of that quiet life; nothing but gloom and solitude at first seemed prepared for the two women. Former friends were dispersed or dead, acquaintances looked doubtfully and hesitatingly at Mrs. Hoffman, as though her resurrection were too confusing for their weak but busy minds, and the golden dreams of companionship and congenial society in which both the mother and daughter had indulged seemed fated for extinction.

But still exceptions to this stranded forlorn life there were. Now and again an old friend found them out; now an artist invited them to his studio, or it was one of that literary clique which Mrs. Hoffman had looked upon in her younger days as holding the gates of paradise, who recognized her, and grateful for former kindnesses, oblivious to all distinctions of position, now gave her his friendship once again, and delighted both Margaret and herself with his

sallies of genius and his tales of the years which she had spent far away. Such a one was Bertram Powys, no longer young save in heart.

Or now it was some "theatrical," who had begun years ago by "amateuring," and thereby victimising all his friends, amongst them Mrs. Hoffman. Later, he had recognized the grandeur of his art, and its worthiness of self-sacrifice and devotion, and he had embraced it now as his profession. Many were the boxes and stalls which, through Orford Ellis, lightened the long nights of that dreary winter for our "returning exiles."

Beyond it all Margaret's spirit sighed for something more. Art truly is a great consoler, but at times the human spirit desires real human sympathy; it desires absolute truth and absolute sincerity. When we are still young and indulge in boundless hopes, and in faith of our right to happiness, Art withholds this individual sympathy. We work it out later for ourselves.

Mrs. Hoffman, though disappointed at the stern realities of London, was not so dejected as Margaret. She had foreseen something of the dull commencement of their life, and she had resolved to put her shoulder to the wheel and work steadily against it.

"Margaret herself, poor child," thought the mother, "cannot understand it all yet; not more than Fritz; but she will in time."

Certainly Fritz did not understand it. Life, shut up in the little house in Hans Place, was a very dull affair indeed compared to his free existence by the dancing Rhine. Here the very people seemed dull and busy, they had no time for play, and there was no river at all. He looked up piteously in the faces of all the members of the household, and his only real enjoyment was in the morning when Margaret took him to the Serpentine for a swim. At first she would throw in his stick mechanically, but presently his excitement and his earnestness would make her laugh, and rouse her to a sense of pleasure in movement.

And through it all where were her thoughts? Where should they be but with Valentin.

How strange it was for her now in this cloudy land to look back on that bright dream in the valley of sunshine. How almost impossible it was for her to believe that this dull girl, walking along the London pavements, full of aspiration indeed and of effort, and catching rare glimpses of possible happiness in a world of art and imagination, was the same girl who had sunned herself

in the vivid sunshine of the hour; had asked for nothing more, but believing in it had been content. Was it really to her that Valentin had uttered this tender saying, had smiled thus? Had he really let her apparently rule him? Was it really because of some innocent raillery of hers, uttered in the innocent joy of her heart, that his handsome face had clouded so suddenly, and ill-restrained passion had shown itself with so much strength? Had she really had that power? Oh no, it was all false! a hideous imposture! He had not cared. It was nothing. He had slipped out of her life now, and had gone on his way light-hearted as ever. Only the other day she had read his name in a German paper as figuring in some military review; she had seen him once so, and then he had been the only man on the ground for her; he had passed brilliant and splendid in all the paraphernalia of his Prussian uniform, and with his charger as proud as himself, and he had saluted her. Now—he might pass. He would still be the only man on the ground for her amid the thousands there, but for her he would be silent, statuesque, nothing. Later there came a paper with an account of all the gay doings at Berlin, and of a fancy ball, and of Valentin's dress. She

thought of him dancing, smiling in girls' eyes, making love—faugh! she felt sick at heart, and went out with Fritz to the Serpentine.

How she began to hate beauty now; to hate smiles, to loathe tenderness. How she longed for truth; and she sought for it in ugly guises, because she thought it more likely to be there. The most blunt manners, the most ungainly figures, the most uncompromising faces, the severest tongues, the faintest smiles, these caught her eye now. Once and again she felt herself musing over Dudley Vane, and his out-spoken passion. That was true? surely that was true. But she would not let herself dwell on that; always her thoughts came back with an intensity past description to Valentin. Could he really let her go like this? and not care what became of her, or what she did with her life? Had he only cared while it amused him and cost him nothing, and now as soon as some effort and determination and some self-sacrifice were needed, did he care no longer? Was she really quite alone? After having been so much, everything to each other had it ended in this—a blank nothing? Were all his theories of friendship, of constancy and of self-denial false after all, thrown out to captivate

her, and now that she was caught to be left lying loose and empty as a noose no longer needed? Was she left to make her way alone in this new life without one crumb of the sympathy she so dearly prized?

But there came a sudden rousing from these sad thoughts at last. Margaret was not wholly deserted; her life was not to be wasted thus. Stern necessity woke both herself and her mother from all apathy, from idle self-reproach, and from vain repinings. A gaunt figure tracked them through the streets, met them at home, even scared gentle Margaret in her solitary musings. Action was imperative, for poverty stared them in the face.

Action imperative. But what were these two to do? By slow degrees it had come home to Mrs. Hoffman that living in London, even so quietly as she was doing, was a very different affair from living at Sonnenthal. Their little amusements must be curtailed, their little comforts done without; and it was curious how as gloom settled more imperiously on Mrs. Hoffman, and pinings and revilings against her distant and negligent connections, against society, and against even her poor departed husband were heard more

and more, Margaret's spirit seemed to rise to the occasion, and she seemed to take a fierce delight in the tumult of adversity against which she had to contend. But she was young and believed in life yet; Mrs. Hoffman was reaching even-tide, was tired and sick of work and of aspiration, save other peoples', and those she deemed her lawful amusement. She had no thirst for success as had Margaret; no longing to give that inner tumult expression.

"At all events, Margaret, you and I can do nothing; we can but sit at home and save. We cannot make money."

"It sounds dull, mother. If we have not got it to spend, we might at least amuse ourselves by trying to make it. Let us do something."

"Woman's work, child, never makes money. It only spends itself."

But let her mother laugh as she might, Margaret resolved to try.

Had they not all sorts of people around them who lived entirely by their brains? surely, surely she could do something.

Margaret cultivated Intellect and Art more assiduously than ever, reverenced the Drama with a more constant worship even than before,

and hung on the pearls of wisdom that dropped from the lips of all the strange-looking, bad complexioned young men who frequented their house, with a devotion that would have been amusing if it had not been so pathetic.

The interest thus kindled in her soul did her good. She saw at least an opening for effort, a glimpse of a life beyond this dull present. Ah! how strangely our views of work and of life alter. At first, work sounds but a sad, uninteresting word, heavy, hard; afterwards we dread life without it; later, we despise life without it. Its necessity is perhaps saddening, but then viewed truly in the noblest light, is it not elevating? When faith in all else has left us, does not our work remain with us, even after us, and do we not turn to it as we would to a trusted friend, if any friend were so trustworthy, and even there find our happiness?

CHAPTER IV.

But lately, one rough day, this flower I past,
And recognized it, though an alter'd form,
Now standing forth an offering to the blast,
And buffeted at will by rain and storm.
Wordsworth.

FRITZ swimming in the Serpentine, and Mrs. Hoffman and Margaret in their waterproof cloaks sitting on a bench looking on.

"I am almost tempted to give up, Margaret. This is hopeless work."

"I am full of hope, mother."

"Because those scatter-brained fellows have been filling your head with nonsense. Well, we must all buy our experience, I suppose; but, Margot, you ought to believe me and take what I have bought. There is not time for you. We shall both be dead before the purchase is completed."

"What would you do, mother?"

"We might go back to Sonnenthal; we have

friends there. We might teach English. We might even keep a school."

Margaret shuddered.

"Oh, the drudgery! And not at Sonnenthal, mother, not there."

"Of course, I know your music and your acting and your drawing are all very pleasant, but they will not make money. They require drudgery too."

"I know, mother—but I am writing a book." Mrs. Hoffman laughed a bitter, sarcastic, irritated laugh.

"You are groping in the dark, child."

"That artistic or literary life is so pleasant, mother. One seems to progress to something higher daily."

"Sentimentally, perhaps. But in fact, Margot, there is but one way for ladies to earn money."

"How, mother?"

"To marry some rich man."

Margaret was silent.

"Not that I see any rich man at hand just now."

"You need not look, mother. I should never do it."

"Why not?"

"I could never deceive any one like that."

"Are we not deceived every day?"

"Yes, we are." Both mother and daughter were thinking of Valentin. "But that is no reason, mutterlein, why we should deceive others. Let us show them what sincerity is, on the contrary."

"Ah! bah! you are too good for this world. Hans put these ridiculous notions in your head. There need be no deception about it either. You would make a rich man a very good wife I am sure, and would be leading a good, useful life too. Besides, if little birds do not feather their nests for themselves, Margot, no one else will do it for them. You ought to have married Dudley Vane."

"Oh, mother!"

"Fine place, lots of money; did I not read the will in the 'Illustrated London News' the other day? Everything left to him absolutely, except one or two legacies. By the way, Mr. Mortimer had a good large legacy."

"Had he?"

"And think what you might have made of that boy!"

"It would not have been an interesting occupation, mother."

"Any how it would have been better than this, watching Fritz shaking the water out of his coat, and our only excitement having a troop of scatter-brained geniuses and penniless authors to supper by and by."

"Why are clever people so often poor I wonder?"

"I suppose necessity sharpens their wits, or they might never find they had any. After all, I had rather have no wits than no income. Poverty sticks in my throat, it is nauseous."

"I am not sure, mother. Really I do not think I mind it much."

Mrs. Hoffman gave a sudden start; a flush of crimson overspread her countenance, her eyes brightened, her manner became youthful, her very bonnet looked smarter, and the folds of her gown seemed to have something more alluring and less dowdy about them.

"Margaret, look!"

A young man, carelessly swinging his stick, was approaching them.

But if the heightened colour mantled on Mrs. Hoffman's matronly cheek, all life seemed to fade from Margaret. The very essence of despair was pictured in her look. Pale, hopeless, like an

animal at bay, she sat shrinking on the bench, almost cowering behind her mother's now upright and hopeful figure.

"Oh, mother!"

"A friend in need, I declare! Dear Dudley Vane; how well he is looking!"

"Do not speak to him; let him pass us, mother. Do not attract his attention!"

"Well," said her mother, looking down at her contemptuously, and sniffing the air, as a war-horse preparing for action, "you are a constant friend, I am sure! See how pleased Fritz is!"

She said this as she rose, and Fritz was close at her side.

"Mr. Vane! Mr. Vane!"

Her two hands were outstretched, on her face was the sweetest smile she could achieve, her attitude one of charmed expectation.

"Mr. Vane, how delightful!"

Margaret sat looking on. Fritz looked too.

Dudley Vane pulled up short. At first the colour fled from the youth's face, then suddenly in great tumultuous waves it came rushing back; Margaret need not doubt his constancy.

"Is it you?" asked he, losing all his presence of mind, wrenching his hand away from Mrs.

Hoffman, and turning to Margaret as if he were groping in the dark.

And Margaret pitied him. He must be helped back to himself. This was dreadful.

So she laughed.

"Yes; it is—

> 'Two more unfortunates
> Scanty of breath,
> Rashly importunate,
> Catching their death.'"

But he could not laugh. He was too full of glad surprise as he sat down on the bench beside them.

"I thought you were still in Germany?"

"One would think we had been dead and were risen again to look at you," said Mrs. Hoffman, laughing.

"And Fritz too," murmured he, stooping to pat the wet dog.

> "Look at his garments
> Clinging like cerements;
> Whilst the wave constantly
> Drips from his clothing;
> Take him up instantly
> Loving, not loathing!"

"Loathing, indeed! I should think not," said Dudley.

> "Touch him not scornfully;
> Think of him mournfully."

"Be quiet, child. Do let us talk sensibly," said Mrs. Hoffman.

"And what are you doing in England?" asked Dudley, turning to Margaret awkwardly, blushing still.

> "Make no deep scrutiny
> Into her mutiny
> Rash and undutiful."

"I shall go home directly, child, if you go on with that nonsense."

"Fancy calling 'The Bridge of Sighs' nonsense. But, mother, perhaps we had better go home. Seriously, Mr. Vane, we are not fit or becoming friends for you now; we are very poor, mother and I; you can have no notion how poor we are. We think we must go away again."

"We have no occupation, and are vagrants—"

"What! no home? no house?——"

"Oh!" and Margaret laughed merrily, "not so bad as that. But we really are too poor to 'get on' in society, as my mother calls it, and we have nothing to do, unless—mother—we might teach German. Shall we teach you German?"

"Are not people kind to you, Queen Daisy? Don't they ask you to their parties? The brutes!"

"They have not seen her yet," said Mrs. Hoffman, meekly.

"Alas! for the rarity
Of Christian charity,
Under the sun;
Oh! it was pitiful!
Near a whole basket full
Cards she had none."

"You'll send him away, Kindlein, you really will send him away," said Mrs. Hoffman in German.

"And so it is dull?" asked he, innocently, wishing she would not chaff any longer.

"Where the lamps quiver
So far in the river,
With many a light
From window and casement,
From garret to basement,
She stood with amazement,
Ball-less by night."

"You expected more fun? like Sonnenthal?"

"In we plunged boldly,
No matter how coldly
The London stream ran;
Over the brink of it,
Picture it—think of it,
Wealthy young man."

"But you will stay? Where do you live?"

"16, Hans Place," said Mrs. Hoffman with alacrity.

"You'll find Fritz always," said Margaret. "Poor ignorant Germany-bred Fritz; innocent dog."

> "See his eyes, close them,
> Staring so blindly!
> Dreadfully staring
> Through muddy impurity,
> As when with the daring
> Last look of despairing
> Fix'd on futurity."

Dudley Vane walked home with them, and as they went, Mrs. Hoffman, too much irritated with Margaret to speak to her, carefully extracted from the youth as much news as she could.

"And you are a rich man now, Sir Dudley Vane; a great man?"

"Oh no; not that. Everything was left to me; we always expected it would be."

"It will give you a great deal to do."

"I don't care about it much."

"And ce cher Monsieur Tudor?" asked Mrs. Hoffman.

"Oh, he is very happy. My uncle promised him the family living when it should be vacant. He has gone abroad again."

"He told us you would be very poor," said Mrs. Hoffman, almost querulously.

"Did he?"

"And can you tell us any news of Sonnenthal——"

"No; I know none."

"Or of Mr. Mortimer?"

"He is somewhere in London."

"Or of Count von Broderode?" asked Margaret.

"No; I know nothing of him."

Margaret looked pained, and there was a silence.

"Will you come in this evening?" asked Mrs. Hoffman, when he offered to leave them, "we shall have a few friends; they may amuse you—pray come."

He promised, only too delighted, and perhaps had never gone but for that chance of speedy return.

"Mother, what are you doing? I don't want him. I will not have him encouraged. It is not fair."

"Margaret, how could you ask after Valentin? Anything so stupid I never heard."

"They were such friends."

"At first, but at the end you know Frau Steingracht told me they never spoke. How could you do it?"

"I did it on purpose. Do you think it cost me nothing?"

Would this mother and daughter ever understand each other? Would they ever really be perfect friends, or help each other to happiness?

Margaret sat at her little window, looking out on the square, with Fritz's great head pillowed on her knee.

"Oh! Fritz," said she, with a miserable foreboding of coming undefined evil pressing at her heart, "what is going to happen to us? Look at the trees, Fritz. Don't they look as if little invisible spirits were playing on the branches—moving them at will? How I wish they would come and help us away somewhere, Fritz. I feel free here no longer."

"Are you in London for long?" she asked of Dudley that evening, as he hung over the piano while she played.

"I am up on business," said he; "there are things to sign."

"Oh! that won't take long."

"I can make it as long as I like."

"Oh! you can, can you?"

Groups were scattered, busily engaged in conversation, through the two tiny rooms; and Dudley came nearer to Margaret, but just then

a tall, impassioned-looking man stepped up, and Margaret smiled provokingly.

"What a rest it is to come here and listen to you," said the man with the musical face, as he threw himself carelessly into a low chair close at her side.

"Music is a rest," said she, softly, "to those who play as well as to those who hear."

"And we hear differently," said Bertram Powys, joining in the conversation, "according to what we need and want to hear. It is like Nature. It has beauties most for those who seek them, and soothing power for those who believe in it."

"I think," said Margaret, "music is very indefinable. And yet I would sooner go to it for comfort than to any other of the arts. It always gives us what we want. Often I cannot say what it is that an air or a tone tells me, and yet it has told me just what I needed for comfort or for strength."

"Yes," said Orford Ellis, "and though it may say one thing to you, another thing to me, yet it will have left the same broad impression on both of us."

"No," said Bertram, "the same pleasure perhaps, but not the same impression."

"Not the same impression!" echoed Dudley.

"We receive it differently according to our humour or state. The delight at the melody may be the same, the gratitude to the musician the same, but the note that to you may speak rest or peace, to me may be one of warning or of encouragement; to you it may be comfort, to me it may bring a tide of vain regrets, of faded memories, or of solemn doom."

"Is not that too sentimental?" said Mrs. Hoffman.

"Are you not putting too much of yourself and your own spirit into the music when you think of it thus?" asked Margaret. "Perhaps Italian music may be turned as you say, but our German music is almost too full of deep feeling to allow of its being twisted to your thoughts thus."

"I do not know. But it has always seemed to me," answered Bertram, "that just when words fail, music steps in to our aid."

"Yes," said Ellis, "and the meaning shown to others, it goes farther still, and helps us to realize our own selves. It is the language of the soul, the delicate vibrations of which the tongue cannot utter."

A silence fell upon them; and presently Margaret, to dissipate the transitory gloom, let her fingers run over the notes, and almost insensibly became absorbed in an air of Chopin. Dudley watched the faces around him brightening, as the well-known notes trilled out! How curious it seemed to him to be standing here, in this room full of strangers; only Mrs. Hoffman and Margaret well-known to him; and to be watching her, apparently so esteemed and admired by all those men; so calm, so self-possessed, so different seemingly from the Margaret of Sonnenthal! How she seemed to delight in their knowledge and cleverness, but how few and how transient were the smiles playing on her face now. As for him, he had not had one real smile yet! Why? Soon the strife of tongues began again, and when Margaret rose from the piano, Dudley found himself following her almost unconsciously. But she seemed weary of him; she turned sharply, and introduced him to a lady sitting there. The lady was stout and stupid.

"Mrs. Ellis, Sir Dudley Vane. Mrs. Ellis sings so charmingly; you will sing to us, will you not?"

So Mrs. Ellis rose and went to the piano, and Dudley found himself back again there. His ears, however, only heard the conversation around Margaret, and they only dwelt on the words she said.

"You are cruel!" said one of the men to Margaret.

"Impossible," replied she.

"Unfeeling coquette!"

"You are unjust," she said.

"A coquette," said another, "is that savage beast of civilization who tortures people of intellect, but they sometimes get their revenge by means of an imbecile."

Margaret blushed hotly.

"You are all like ships at sea," said she, "who cannot make the harbour for want of a light-house to show you where it is."

"We are blind, ignorant people, who know nothing."

"I thought Mr. Wemyss had promised us his new play to-night," said Margaret lightly.

"Ah!" said a sallow-looking man, drawing a deep sigh, "it was wanted, the manager would not wait. It was unfinished and bad, all unfit—but, alas!

'The unhappy man who once has trail'd a pen,
Lives not to please himself, but other men.'"

"Ah, well; let it be. We are born unfinished. Let it grow to perfection."

"But, my friend, we should try to perfect ourselves, not to let our friends perfect us."

"Miss Margaret," said an enthusiastic man leaning across the table to her, as he suddenly seemed to issue from the gloom of meditation and self-contemplation, "we are all idolators; some of one thing, some of another. What do you worship?"

For a moment Dudley's eyes met hers, but she lowered them instantly and coldly, to raise them the next moment steadily to those of her questioner.

"Truth," said she.

There was a pause.

"Can you find it?" asked he in a softer tone.

"No," said she bitterly. "If I could, perhaps I should not worship it."

"You will find it some of these days," said Bertram Powys, in a slow hesitating voice, "not as you expect it or as you want it; but you will work it out for yourself somehow."

"And shall I be content with it?"

"Yes; at least you would not willingly part with it."

"As for me, I worship Fame," said a young man standing by, who had been trying to snuff the candle.

"Which neither can you find."

There was a laugh at his expense.

"And I Honour," said another.

"And I Wealth," said another.

There was a groan of horror.

"I do. If I were rich what poetry I would write; how I would trim it and clip it and polish it; for there would be no hurry, and my life would be spent in a dream of beauty—intellectual and artistic; now time is money, and I can afford no dreams at all. But I have always to be shaking myself roughly, to be clipping everything everywhere, and to be calculating always the shortest cut to any point. Doesn't Charles Lamb say, 'O how I wish I were a rich man, even though I were squeezed camel-fashion at getting through that needle's eye that is spoken of in the *Written Word?*' If I were only rich I would publish beautiful editions of my own beautiful works, and never be beholden to, or be at the mercy of, any publisher at all."

"You might perhaps be carried away by your imagination, and cultivate some weeds of your production amidst the flowers."

"At least I should not be dependent on the bad taste and popular opinion of the day; fame depends on gaining the ear of the crowd."

"And the crowd is fickle, as in the days of Cæsar and Brutus and Antony."

"At all events," said another, "the crowd is never grave for long. I am sure comedy is always more successful than tragedy."

"Yes," said Orford Ellis. "Humour is a wonderfully precious gift, it is like giving away handfuls of happiness. Voltaire says, you know—

> "Tous les gens sais ont le don precieux
> De mettre en bon train tous les gens serieux."

"Humour is but mimicry," said the aspirant after wealth. "Is that ever poetry?"

"I do not know," said Bertram, "but I know it has always paid to make people laugh; publishers tell you so every day, and what great comedian cannot command his own terms?"

"Ah!" said Margaret, "I must look about for jokes; my book must be funny."

"What sort of book is it to be?" asked they, laughing.

"A novel, of course."

"Is it to be a novel with no sort of harm in it—for young girls? or one for old maids? they like stories of every-day life, quite calm and unsensational, with some terrible piece of masculine wickedness to be unveiled at the end, and injured innocence triumphant. Stories of martyred women like themselves, who sit day by day over their knitting, counting one, two, slip one, knit three; while their hearts beat irregularly, and a volcano smoulders in their souls. Such stories of lives knitted away, and a crown of glory (for the knitting) at the end."

"Or will you write a sportsman's novel; sport and scandal and a good spice of immorality?"

"Or an old gentleman's novel, in which, careless of period or of too studied a language, they can unravel some knotty point of the law, or laugh again at seeing themselves or their contemporaries in some former political scrape?"

"Or give us a love story for the young people?"

"Or a social story for the *chaperons?*"

"Or for the more thoughtful, a story with a purpose?"

"You will frighten her from attempting a story at all," said Mrs. Hoffman.

"A purpose! Yes! you shall have a purpose; but it will be so veiled," said Margaret, "that only half of you will find it out. But I have been sadly puzzled in thinking about the novels of the present day. Try one's best, fulfil one's best aspirations, put one's best work into it, and then see—is it likely to take?"

"No," said several of the young men.

"Art pulls one this way, and the publishers, press, and public opinion pull one that. Who cares for ideals? Who cares for art?"

"You must gild the pill, Miss Hoffman," said Bertram. "The public is but a baby after all, it likes bright colours, and as for strong meat, you know it is taught to feed only by degrees."

"If one dwells on events," said one of the youngest of the guests, "that have the highest spiritual significance, so as to show more vividly the spiritual meaning and work of a life,—who cares for spiritual significance or result?"

"No," said he who had advised humour. "Are not amusing incidents rather preferred?"

"And rightly so," said Orford Ellis. "We have sculptures, pictures, poetry, to show us

beauty and truth, and essentially art. Who wants metaphysics and morals in a novel? Is not a novel a thing taken up after a day of labour, or in a moment of tooth-ache, or in an hour of suffering or *ennui*—when any effort or mental strain, or any great admiration would weary us intolerably? No! make a moral, if you please, to satisfy yourself for toiling over so many miles of foolscap, but let it be a good flaring moral, something that shall strike us at once, that will require no search. We are but superficial readers, and prefer books without a purpose to one that requires thought. For that we can go to our learned men, the prophets and martyrs of science."

"No," said Bertram, "save coarse amusement, the novel-reading world wants nothing. It cannot rise to art's devotion, or to art's joy. It is in love with itself, and will make art subservient to its wants if it can. It will never trouble itself to rise to art's level. It laughs at art singing over its head, it laughs at those who find peace in listening to its songs, it says, 'Come down, that *we* may hear you.'"

"That is like trying to make an angel human," said Margaret.

"But there are a few of us," said Bertram, proudly, "who worship our angel undisturbed."

There was a laugh of sympathy.

"Always it has been so, I believe," said a bright-faced youth; "always true artists have rebelled against the trammels of society, and against its miserable pettifogging conventionalities."

"They have been compelled," said one of the former speakers, "to close the door of their work-shop against the turmoil and unreasonable unrest of the world, and have opened it gladly to the sympathy and congeniality which their fellow-workers have brought them."

"Ah! what should we do without each other?" exclaimed Ellis. "The encouragement, the strength companionship gives us; the—shall I say it? The valuable ideas one gets from each other; the — saving clauses — we bestow—"

"The sarcasms which save us from hideous ruin."

"The imagination our witty conversations kindle."

"The—— How late it is! Mrs. Hoffman, we must go!"

"I should like to know your histories—your literary histories, I mean," said Margaret.

Laughter and quaint smiles broke out.

"That was a saving clause certainly," said one.

"Our odd Bohemian lives are much more interesting than those of other mortals," said another.

"I am sure of it," said Margaret. "But don't wish to be rich, Mr. Montague. This is much better. I like what you do. You all do something; you all teach something. Rich people mostly teach us how to exist, how to stagnate, how to bear fate; you teach how to overcome it."

It was late indeed. Departure was the order of the hour. Dudley stood by Margaret.

"I shall not forget this evening in a hurry."

"Have you liked it?"

"I remember what you said."

"What did I say?"

"You said you cared most for truth."

"Did I?"

"Do you remember our evening at Biberich?"

"Yes."

"All I said then was true, is true now, and always will be. I am true."

Margaret did not look up or answer.

"Do you believe me?"

"I cannot hear you, I will not, must not believe you."

Just then her mother bustled up.

"Dear Sir Dudley, a dull evening for you, I am afraid. I was obliged to talk to Mrs. Ellis."

"May I come again?"

"Will you? That will be kind. As often as ever you like. We have not much to offer, but while you are in town pray make this your home or head-quarters, or whatever you like to call it."

"You must have so many friends in London," stammered Margaret.

"But I would rather come here than anywhere," said he.

"You will find us very dull and busy," said she, with a sudden effort. "As for me, I shall be always at my novel. I am going to overcome fate so."

Her mother laughed.

"And I will blot the pages for you," said Dudley.

"Will you?" said the girl, angrily. "No one shall touch one of my pages till I choose. Good-night, Sir Dudley."

She was gone.

"Do not mind her," said Mrs. Hoffman. "Our poverty makes her querulous, I think. Come to-morrow and let us have a talk."

So he went away literally happy after all. Was not Mrs. Hoffman on his side?

"Fancy *our* having a talk," laughed Mrs. Hoffman to herself, as she lit her candle. "Who ever heard Dudley talk, except Margot? What a long solo I shall have to play if the child is not civil."

CHAPTER V.

> But I am constant as the northern star,
> Of whose true, fix'd, and resting quality,
> There is no fellow in the firmament.
>
> *Julius Cæsar*, Act iii. Sc. 2.

> Cela est parfaitement beau, mais cela est bien ennuyeux.
>
> *Mme. de Longueville.*

Hitherto Dudley Vane had hated London. It was dull, gloomy, it was horrible. But now "a change came o'er the spirit of his dream," and there was, he thought, no place like London. It was curious how many things he had to see, how much business he had to finish before he could think of going back to Froghambury. For the present, certainly, the idea of returning to the country was quite out of the question. London, he began to think, was pleasanter than Sonnenthal. Here there was no Valentin, here there was no Mr. Tudor, here Mrs. Hoffman was more friendly than ever she had been before, and here comparatively he had Margaret more to himself. He

could find no one to excite his jealousy among the literary visitors who assembled in the little house in Hans Place, and Mrs. Hoffman made him welcome at all hours.

Margaret certainly was not tender; she was hardly friendly, and even in jest she managed somehow to keep him at a distance. But still he hoped, and was but waiting for his opportunity. He thought if he could but catch her in the right humour some day when she was alone, and tell her the story of his love over again, and show her how constant he was, then she must be won. She must at least be grateful, and from her gratitude he hoped much. Then from her poverty he hoped more; from that beginning he would in time win her love.

But the days passed away, and Dudley and Margaret came no nearer. He was always watching her, always waiting, and she was always kind, always civil, but there was no individual smile for him in particular, no word or sign that he could construe into meaning any more for him than it meant for the artists and authors and actors who were laughing there, if, indeed, it meant so much. For soon, Dudley Vane began to think that the veriest newspaper

writer or the most miserable scene-painter or play-wright had an infinitely greater share in Margaret's mind than he could boast. At once he hated them all, and consigned them to a huge vat, labelled Jealousy. They fermented in his brain in unconscious indifference. How too he hated every sharp word they spoke, or every bit of work they ever did; how, failing brains himself in his impotence, he hated every bit of brains any other man ever had. How particularly he loathed the smile that lighted Margaret's eyes when she heard a witty word or a sharp speech. Why had he no thoughts, not one idea in the world? Would he never, never be able to win her smile of approval like that?

But in truth Margaret was beginning to smile oftener now. She was feeling more secure. It seemed so easy to keep Dudley at a distance; he seemed always so far away, always so far behind, it seemed an impossibility that he should ever ask now to come nearer. He must see now how different they were, how little sympathy there was between them, how antagonistic they must always be. He must, so Margaret thought, have learnt at last to be content with a real friendship. So she smiled content. The flowers

he sent were a pretty attention; they made the rooms so sweet. They reminded her of Sonnenthal. They made her think she was rich. The plays they went to were so amusing; of course he could not go alone, and he always told her to ask some one else, so certainly he could not be in love with her now, or he would have been more jealous. The dinners he gave them were so nice. The little parties were so amusing; oh, certainly, he could not care, or he would not tell her to ask who she liked. Certainly, he threw out hints often about the stupidity of her friends. He had called her pet painter's picture a "daub," and he had said Wemyss' play was "indecent," and that Montague's statue was "all wrong," and had often called Bertram Powys and Orford Ellis "stupid asses," but then that only showed his ignorance, and told her what a really silly boy he was, so that did not affect her in any way. It only showed how right and discriminating she had been in her judgment, and showed her too that if he thought thus of her friends, he must be beginning to dislike her too, and to class her also as a "stupid ass," or as something in the same category. Or evidently now, if she wanted to make the most of it, he at last understood friend-

ship. They were to be good friends and that was all. In that there was security. Sometimes, certainly, he presumed on their friendship; was, if possible, too constant and became a bore; but is not a woman always being bored? It is an ill impossible to escape from entirely; it is one of the especial evils female flesh is heir to.

In Margaret's meditations about friendship she forgot the elasticity of the term, the chameleon nature of the feeling. It may mean love, indifference, warm interest, or acquaintance. Margaret thought, save for that matter of being a continual bore, that Dudley Vane's love had cooled to an interested acquaintance. Then suddenly it struck her, why, if that were all, and if Dudley needed no more pity, no more condolence, if he had thrown her over as he seemed to have thrown over Valentin, why should she bear this boredom? She began to beat against the bars of the cage, to flutter against this fettering friendship, and to make a stand for more complete independence. Then she was surprised to find astonished looks resting on her, as though the idea of her possible rebellion were strange and disquieting.

"Mother, why do you always ask Dudley Vane to walk to church with us? As if he could not

walk by himself, or as if we could not go by ourselves."

"My dear, I am sure we could, but I do not know that he would go, if left to himself. I feel quite like a mother towards that young man; I am sure Mrs. Vane would thank me if she knew."

"I am sure she would," said Orford Ellis, who happened to be sitting there.

And then Margaret began to be suspicious. She noticed Dudley was always placed by her, as though it was his right; at supper or luncheon his chair was supposed to be by hers; listening to music in their little drawing-room, always the place on the sofa or by the piano seemed to be reserved for Dudley, and how deaf and stupid and blind every one else seemed suddenly to become!

A dim perception of the plot came to her, and in a flash of uncontrollable anger one evening, she burst out, just as Dudley was going to sit beside her—

"You bore me to death; go away."

How the others laughed. They had a merrier evening afterwards than they had spent for a long time.

All this time there was a smothered feeling of resentment towards her mother in Margaret's

heart, but no word on the subject was spoken between them.

Margaret noticed soon that if any one was sitting with her in the afternoon, and if Dudley came, then at once her visitor or visitors rose, and she was left alone. Sometimes they only went into the other room, sometimes they played the piano, or became immersed in manuscripts; still, signal or converse as Margaret might, no sooner did even a comma or colon occur in conversation, than the visitor was sure to hail it as a possible opportunity for departure.

The conversation with Dudley was sure to flag; and its slow length was all the more irritating to Margaret, as she was conscious how much the rest must imagine she enjoyed it. It flagged, because Dudley was only interested in one subject, and that was Margaret, and on that subject Margaret was determined Dudley should not converse.

One day, Bertram Powys was sitting with her. He was talking with animation, happily, when the door opened, and Dudley came in.

"Here is my spectre," said Margaret, in a low voice. "Don't go."

But Bertram seemed turned to stone. All animation had left him.

Dudley took a chair, and Margaret tried to piece together the broken conversation.

"And so?"—said she.

"Really, I must go," exclaimed he wildly, seizing his hat. "I had no idea it was so late."

"Oh, but finish your story."

"Story? story? Ah! I have forgotten the story; have indeed. Good-bye, good-bye, Vane."

So he was gone, and silence reigned supreme.

"You send them all away," said Margaret, angrily.

"They do not like me," answered Dudley, complacently.

"And I do not wonder. You never say anything."

"I only just tolerate them for your sake."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"I will try to like them better to please you."

"It is very cold to-day."

"Very."

Then he looked at his boot.

"What have you been doing to-day?'

"Nothing. Walking about till it was time to come here."

"A glorious existence."

"I don't care to do anything but come here."

"Don't you find it very different from Sonnenthal?"

"Very. I like it better."

"You were not so dull there."

"Dull? who is dull? I did not see so much of you there."

"No, fortunately! You do not care for your friends really though, after all?"

"What do you mean?"

"Only that you talked to me a great deal of friendship, but there is no interest really in your mind for them."

"Who do you mean?"

"A man saves your life, is your 'ami intime,' your ideal — now you know nothing about him."

"Do you?"

"No, nothing! But he never saved my life; only spoilt it. Now I have begun again. I am a different person, with different aims, different hopes, different interests. But still——"

"Still what?"

"You should not have given up your friendship. That was mean."

"This is not fair; you are unjust."

"Then we will talk of something else."

"What are you going to do? Will you marry either of these men?"

He spoke with the assumed air of an old friend.

"I? No, I shall never marry at all. How very cold it is. Would you mind putting some coals on the fire?"

When the execrable din consequent on this duty was over, Margaret went on.

"Don't they want you at Froghambury?"

"Yes, very much."

"When are you going?"

"Soon."

"The country must be much pleasanter than this."

"I wish you would come and see Froghambury."

"I? Oh no! That would be dreadful."

Dudley stirred the fire.

"Sir Dudley, I wish you would do something for me."

"Of course I will. What is it?"

"Why, the fact is, Fritz wants a walk so much, and I have had no time to give him one to-day; I wish you would take him with you."

Dudley had not meant to go for the next hour, but now there seemed no help for it.

"Thank you so much. Fritz will be so grateful."

Fritz grateful indeed! Was that all the gratitude he was to get? Dudley vowed he would not go far, as he shut the street-door on himself and the dog.

Orford Ellis was coming up at the moment. He saw him absolutely laughing.

"Another of them," thought Dudley to himself. "What can be the attraction to her?"

Ellis was bound on no pleasant mission as it happened.

Margaret was still alone.

"Shall we be undisturbed?" asked he.

"Yes."

"I have bad news."

Then he produced a great roll of paper.

"Oh, no!" said she, sharply, "not that! I cannot bear it."

He turned away to give her time.

"You mean," said she, in a lighter tone, recovering herself, "my work, my story has come back to me."

"It is that."

"I cannot write?"

"I did not say that."

"What is it?"

"These publishers will not take the risk. And, in fact, I have looked it over myself——"

"I know. I have been too self-confident. I always am. I believe in everything, in everybody too readily, and in myself too implicitly."

"You have not worked enough yet. You cannot take fame by storm like that. You must learn to work and to wait, that is all."

"I can work, but to wait is impossible."

"It is very hard."

"Thank you, Mr. Ellis, for all your kindness."

How long did he go prosing on? Margaret never knew. He talked of work, he called it drudgery; he talked of rising early, and sitting late; always it was work; he talked of novelists, he talked of plots; she sat still and listened dutifully; always when she heard it was of the same dreary round,—work, work, work.

At last the door opened, and Margaret thought she would be free to cry, or to faint, or to do what she liked.

But it was Dudley Vane and Fritz.

"Oh, you have come back, have you?" said she, drearily.

Then Orford Ellis got up and went. And

Margaret and her tormentor faced each other in dull silence once again.

It was too much. She had thought to work out her deliverance, to make herself free of Dudley, of fate, of her mother. And now the deliverance had failed her, her hopes were all false, and here was Dudley facing her.

She turned away from him, she hid her face in the sofa-cushions, and she burst into tears.

Dudley started up.

"The brute! What has he been doing? What has he been saying?"

Fritz nestled up to her and laid his head on her arm.

"Nothing," said she, caressing the dog. "Do go away. You don't understand."

"Can't I do anything?"

Margaret tried to stop crying.

"What is the matter?"

"My book has come back from the publishers."

"Thank Heaven! Is that all?"

Margaret took her handkerchief away from her face and stared at him, red eyes and all.

"How stupid you are!"

"I know I am. But what is it?"

"The story has come back, so I can't earn any

money, and we are so poor, and I can do nothing."

"I am so glad."

"Look here! I forgive you all you say. You do not understand. You do not know. I have been all wrong, I know, but you might feel for me a little."

"You will send all those fellows away now?"

"Why?"

"Because they are no use."

"But they are my life!"

"Your life? You are mad."

"Don't you see I must do something?"

"No. Let me try. Here I am; just the same as ever. Come and share Froghambury with me; don't you know I love you? always have? You might let me be happy at last. Have I not waited patiently? The novel has had its turn, surely now——"

Margaret opened her eyes full upon him.

"Didn't I give you your answer at Biberich? Have you not always known that I must say No?"

"Could not you change?"

"No; I never change."

"Will not you try?"

"Wrong again! Am I always to be wrong? Have I deceived you as well as myself? I thought you did understand friendship at last—"

"I thought you liked me better, perhaps, now."

"It is not fair. I told you. I gave you your answer. Then you asked me for friendship; and now, when I am most sad, most heart-broken, you come back with the old story again. I seem fated to make every one unhappy."

"If you would only let me try to make you happy——"

"Look! shall I tell you all about it?" said she, with sudden inspiration. "If I told you, then you could not care, then you would see how useless it all is, how different my life is. You see, I lost my father, and then I saw it all. I saw how useless and careless and selfish I had been; I saw how thoughtless I had been about you—how, perhaps, I had encouraged you without meaning, and how foolish the dream of friendship was then. I saw how negligent I had been of my father. I learnt it all then. I had just gone with the hour. I believed what every one told me, and I listened to all that was pleasant; and I was so self-confident, I thought

I had but to shape out my life as I liked, and that everything would come as I wanted it. Things don't, do they?"

"It seems not."

"Oh no! Any sorrow teaches one that. In the long dark hours at Blumenthal, when he was dead, I thought it all out."

"Well!"

"Well! then there was Valentin, you know."

"Yes?"

"I believed in him, you know, as much as I believed in myself and in life. But that was wrong too. He never cared."

Just for a moment Dudley felt a pang of pity. Should he tell her? should he save her? No! he would hear to the end. What were Valentin's affairs to him?

"Didn't he?"

"Oh no! When he didn't see me he forgot me. So then I learnt by degrees what truth was, and that it hardly ever exists in anybody; not because they do not want to have it, but because they are not good enough or strong enough to have it. And that one does not depend on any one; but that one must make one's life independent of every one."

"Well?"

"Well! so then I made up my mind that my life must consist of work and of self-sacrifice."

"Rather dull, won't it be?"

"Dull? I don't so much mind that. But—if it shouldn't succeed?"

"Ah! well then, here am I."

"You see," she went on, not attending to him, "I was living on my work. If now I cannot work——"

"Well! I say, Queen Daisy, never mind the work. Leave it all. You were not made to work. Trust me, now— You and I—"

"How selfish you are! Here I am shipwrecked, not seeing the harbour at all——"

"And I would pilot you in."

"Once for all, you know your life would not suit me. You know we are so different. You know—why, oh why, do you tempt me so? Is it fair? I want to be your best friend, that is all I can be."

"It seems to me so simple."

"Yes; because you cannot see. I should be deceiving you——"

"Dear me, no! You have spoken plainly enough."

"Just to-day of all days, when all my plans and hopes seem overthrown, and I cannot——"

Then he rose.

"I will come again to-morrow."

"Of course you will."

But they shook hands, and Margaret and Fritz were left together.

CHAPTER VI.

Oui, la vie paisible est courte. Cinquante ans passent comme un jour dans le sommeil de l'âme : mais la vie d'émotions et d'évènements résume en un jour des siècles de malaise et de fatigue.

George Sand.

Neither the next day or the next did Dudley Vane return to see Margaret. He had been rebuffed, rudely pushed away, his tenderness scorned, and his passion regarded as "selfish." It was not much wonder that he felt hurt, and that he should delay before he again subjected himself to a similar reception. Yet, he never, even in his wildest moment of anger, dreamed of giving up. Obstinate determination was one of his chief characteristics, and having made up his mind that life at Froghambury or anywhere else would be impossible without Margaret, he saw no other solution of the enigma but that Margaret must share his life with him. That she would in time come round to his plans he never doubted.

After all, he thought, it was but waiting. It was like watching the flutterings of a bird in a cage, or the beatings of a moth against a window; in time it sees its impotence, and sheer exhaustion makes it yield. In time too, Margaret, seeing how her mother and all her friends were on his side, seeing too how constant he was, and how true was his affection, finding too that Valentin was worthless and fickle, and that no one was so steadfast as himself, then surely she would love him at last.

Dudley forgot how impulsive had been his own passion, that there was something ungenerous, relentless in this determined subjugation; forgot too how impossible King Cupid is to restrain or to command, or how apt he is to choose his kingdom for himself. In the abject obedience Dudley himself paid to him, he forgot or did not see the dire rebellion to which he tried to incite Margaret.

Sitting in his lodgings, walking in the streets, thinking it all over, always he forgot Margaret's individual life, her dreams, her wants, her ambitions, her needs; always he thought he loved her; but it was himself whom he loved in her.

In keeping away from her now for a few days, it was not that his love had cooled, or that her rebuffs were likely really to send him away; it was rather that she had said, when he had exclaimed that he would come again to-morrow, "Of course you will," so that, like all weak people, he wished to show her that "Of course he would not."

Moreover, he had an idea of trying new tactics. Perhaps she had had too much of him lately, had never realized what her life would be without him, had learnt to take too much as a matter of course the attentions and kindnesses with which he invariably surrounded her. She should just miss him, therefore, just see that he was not to be trifled with, that he was neither a slave or a dog, to be ordered about, or to be dispensed with according to her humour.

"After all, perhaps," thought he, "she does love that dog more than anything else in the world. I have often thought so. I hate it."

After that he lit his cigar, and proceeded once more to think it all over. As if he had not often thought it all over before, and as if he did not always come to the same conclusion. But there was something refreshing in reminding himself

still of his power, that he still possessed his independence, and that if he chose he could still go away and cut the cords altogether.

"Was it wise," thought he, "to bind himself for life to a woman who almost said she did not like him? Was it wise to depend on her goodness of heart, and on her ideas of duty? Would her illusions really go? Would she see the fallacy of them? Would he really be able to dissipate all her foolish dreams about a life of work and of self-sacrifice, all her silly ambitions, all her aspirations and eagerness for art, and for art's triumphs, and art's consolations? What did she mean by it all? Would she really be able to learn from him quite easily what a quiet, comfortable, easy-going thing life really is?"

"Oh, yes," answered he to himself, "I have but to take her home with me; I can easily alter all that. The horses and the dogs, and the house, and the park, and the free country life, will soon put her all right. How I shall like to show it to her, and to get her out of this. And," added he, crossing one leg conceitedly over the other, "besides all that, think of winning over the head of that conceited German fellow. There they thought me dull, there they always made

way for him, and I was pushed anywhere; now! I don't understand it, he seemed so sanguine, so sincere—— If, really, he gave it all up for nothing, there never was such brutal behaviour to a woman before."

That afternoon, walking up Bond Street, where, in fact, he was looking for a present to take Margaret, he ran across Mr. Mortimer.

"Why, Vane, this is a surprise. I knew you were in London; but why have you not been to see me?"

Dudley looked rather foolish.

"I am just off to America. Start to-morrow."

"To America?"

"Yes; I have some property there must be looked after, and I shall be glad to see the country. I shan't be away long. How is your mother?"

"Very well, I believe. But I have not been home just lately."

"So I hear. She wrote to me, sadly anxious about you, and asking me to look you up. But I have been so pressed for time—— What are you doing in London?"

"The lawyers have not done with me yet."

By this time they were walking together up the street.

"It's all right, I suppose, about the succession?"

Mr. Mortimer looked at him sharply.

"Right? Oh, yes; all right!"

"No difficulties? eh?"

"Lots of things to sign."

"No later will found, or anything, eh? disagreeable?"

"No. You know all about it. This is the last will, you know. You and old Douglas witnessed it."

"Yes, exactly."

"Years ago."

"And so you are a man of property, Dudley. Stick to it, old fellow. It's a noble place, and worth looking after."

"Yes, it is a noble property. My mother says so."

"When I come back from America I will come and see how you are getting on. Think of Gilbert in all you do, and don't *improve* too much. That is all."

"I shall only act as if he were there."

"That is right. He loved the place, and,

Dudley, he loved you. Don't forget that. Will your mother live there?"

"For the present, I suppose. And Uncle Ted."

"Her brother?"

"Yes."

"How old are you?"

"I came of age last autumn."

"You are not thinking of marrying yet awhile?"

"Oh no!"

"By-the-by, have you seen any more of our friends at Sonnenthal?"

"Mr. Tudor has gone abroad again."

"And that charming German, Von Broderode?"

"Oh no; I know nothing of him."

"Although, if it hadn't been for him, you would not have been here? eh?"

"Yes; but I suppose he will come to England some time."

"Oh, doubtless. If only to find Miss Hoffman. By the way, of course you know where she is?"

Dudley changed colour, and then, swinging his stick, he answered.

"I? Why should I? I know nothing about her."

The assumption of frankness and nonchalance deceived Mr. Mortimer, and he believed him.

"I breathe again. I need not say we were anxious. That is why your mother is so anxious. She thinks that is why you will stay in London."

Dudley laughed.

"I thought so too; for I heard that when the Professor died, they came to London."

"Did they?"

"Oh, I am not going to tell you anything if you don't know. Don't let me be the one to put you on their track. Miss Margaret is very dangerous, very dangerous. But anyhow you must not marry yet, not for years—not for ever so long. Good-bye, Dudley, and give your mind to the farm and estate, and look after the foxes too."

Then Dudley wished him a pleasant journey and a safe return, and when they had shaken hands, and Dudley found himself alone again, he was chiefly conscious of angry resentment against his mother and all his friends, Mr. Mortimer included, for their interference in his affairs, and more determined to marry Margaret than ever.

It was late that evening when he reached Hans Place, and the unwonted illumination seen from without made him expect a larger assembly than usual of those "choice spirits" whom he disliked

so much. He was half inclined to turn away. But the wish to see Margaret again held him to it, and he went in. The first sound he heard was loud applause, clappings of hands, shouts of "Bravo, bravo, bra— bra—"

He did not like it, but he went upstairs. Yes; the room was full of people, and it was very light, and there was something going on in the inner room, at which they were all looking. He liked it less, he felt inclined to slip away. But Mrs. Hoffman had seen him. No escape now. After all, how hearty and warm her welcome was. It brought balm to his wounded spirit. He found himself sitting in a chair at the back beside his hostess. The truth was, that if Dudley's absence had cost him an effort, much real suffering and perturbation had it cost Mrs. Hoffman. She had wondered and puzzled over it, till she had destroyed alike her sleep and her appetite; she had wanted to write to him, to call him back, only that she felt so much in the dark about his absence that she feared she might be guilty of some indiscretion. Her dearest hopes seemed to be fading away; her fairest dreams but empty visions. She sighed to herself, and grew pale and dispirited, and if she had known it to say she would have said,—

"The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of."

But now Dudley had come back to them, and smiles rippled once again over her well-preserved countenance.

The occasion of this entertainment was that Mr. Wemyss had written another play, and his friends were determined to see how it would run. Much laughing had they had over it, many alterations had they made, and half of the points Dudley did not understand. Something he did know, however, and that was that Margaret was acting on the mimic stage, and that he had never seen her look so beautiful in his life before. It was a costume-piece, and the old-fashioned dress and the powder suited her admirably. There was a fire, an inspiration, and withal a nobility on her face, which hitherto had been a sealed book to Dudley Vane.

Margaret, of course, was the prima donna of the piece, and Orford Ellis was her lover. Her part was to feign disbelief in his attachment, though herself madly in love with him. Every word she says is a test, though masking her own feeling; every look speaks coquetry and disdain, though her heart is breaking. Then he leaves her, and

her heart does seem to break. She brings out a letter, which tells of his faithlessness to her, of his attachment to another, and she soliloquizes pathetically, amid sobs and tears and angry resentment, how she had doubted the letter, how she had put it away from her, and how she had wished to believe in him through all; but now the bitter truth has come. Then follows a bitter speech, in which she seems to gather strength, as she talks of women's love and their broken hopes; of false flattery, and of the unreality of all save art and effort and self-forgetfulness; and then, her mind made up, she is going forth on a life of solitude and of self-denial, when the lover reappears, and passionately claims her love.

How gravely and sorrowfully she puts him away; how nobly she does it; how pathetically the hard words come out, as if her very soul was wrung by them, but as if her intense love of truth made her say them!

"He would never give up a woman like that," said Mrs. Ellis, who was sitting near Dudley.

"Just her very earnestness in refusing would make one return to the charge, till she gave in," said Bertram Powys.

And so at last the heroine gave in. But how

slowly, how tenderly. How hard she found it to believe, seemingly. How she put it away from her, two or three times, this thing that her soul thirsted for so passionately. How she yielded at last to her own feeling and her own want under protest as it were, because he told her she might. And then at last how she portrayed the joy she felt.

"Then there is such a thing as human happiness after all," said Bertram, when Margaret had left the stage, and was receiving ovations and praise from all around her.

As for Dudley, he was pale with emotion, and never offered to speak to her, only held her hand for a moment in his. Perhaps he could not well speak, not such words as he wanted to say, for Mr. Wemyss was there, and Mr. Wemyss was frantic between divided admiration for Margaret and for himself. Who commanded success—was it Margaret's acting or his own authorship?

"If you would only take it on the stage for me," sighed he.

"I should be lost on the stage," said she, prophetically.

At supper, which speedily followed, being speedily needed, with the relaxation and recreation it brings in its train, Dudley sat far away

from Margaret. No one knew why. He only seemed to care to look at her and to listen to what she might say. If he had asked himself, he would have said that to-night he was afraid of her.

The conversation went far away from him. Dudley was forgotten.

"What good soup this is, Mrs. Hoffman," said Ellis——

"May I have some more?" asked Montague.

"Now," said Wemyss, "here is your health, and yes! This wine *is* excellent. Now I am quite happy."

"Is not this dreadful? quite dreadful?" exclaimed Bertram, as he helped Margaret; "they think of nothing but their creature comforts after all. It absolutely ends in nothing."

> "Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,"

began Orford Ellis, with his mouth full, but he was hissed down.

> "Could force his soul so to his own conceit,
> That from her working, all his visage warm'd;
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in 's aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit,"

quoted Margaret.

"And all for nothing," concluded Bertram, as

he plunged a knife and fork into a pie, in front of him.

"But it is not all for nothing, after all," said Montague.

"No," said Wemyss, "we excite the sympathies by dramatic representation. We do not exactly preach morality, like a tract does, we do not even make a tag of our moral; I do not know that we even always inculcate anything immediately practical; but we strive to awaken noble sympathies, and to sound the chords of elevated feeling and of generous emotions, and so we stir into life the best part of the character."

"It is like music. It awakens sympathy, and leaves it for the life and circumstance of each individual to develope it into work."

"But I have another thought about it besides that," said Ellis. "I think the first aim of dramatic art is to illustrate the development of the human soul, to make us better acquainted with ourselves and each other; to warn us of our temptations, to teach us to judge others leniently."

"Yes," said Wemyss, "certainly it should be so. And the one thought and end does not preclude the other. Our plays should depend on the persons in them; they themselves should

work out the conclusions. For this we must have individuals, not classes. Not a pattern or a set; not the inevitable 'heavy father,' whose will every one knows; not the marriageable girl, whose destiny every one also knows; not the 'eligible' or the 'ineligible' as the case may be, but characters with wills, not mere parts of their own——"

"Yes, characters, who shall seem to bow to or to triumph over their fate according to their dispositions; characters who shall develope themselves and their strength before our eyes, so that as we follow them we shall be able to foresee their conduct, and their rise or their fall."

"You are talking almost too wisely for me," said Margaret.

"We are getting very dull, I believe."

"For my part I have always looked upon 'the play' as an amusement, and I am not going to give up my idea lightly."

"Nor need you. That must be a very bad 'play' indeed from which one can get no amusement."

"Who sees a play by Shakespeare, or Goldsmith, or Sheridan, without being amused?" asked Mrs. Hoffman.

"And instructed as well."

"Oh, of course; indirectly we learn great lessons. We see the human heart bared before us. I read that somewhere this morning."

"How fortunate it is for young England that the prejudices against the play-houses are being so universally overcome."

"Yes; as the prejudices against novels are forgotten too."

"I am not sure that they are."

"Oh, yes; the oldest lady with the falsest front and the bluest of spectacles sees now that the most important lessons of life may be taught best when gilded by the fascinating garb of fiction. Imagination is everything when we are young."

"Art impresses its lessons pleasantly. Parents must see that."

"Do not let us begin upon Art now," said Margaret.

"No; that cream would be so much better," said Wemyss. "We all know all about Art," he added, apologetically, looking round. "It is the perfect expression of human feeling, and it not only expresses, but it creates feeling. *a. s. w.* the sphere of the artist is eternal."

There was a laugh at his "hackneyed phrase."

"Did you say eternal or external?"

"It is both; eternal and limitless; external in that it is expression; and it is eternal, for it is the influence of his soul on other souls."

"Meanwhile, let us drink Wemyss' health and the success of his play. Who knows? the next generation may call him the 'immortal bard.'"

"Oh! ghost of great Shakespeare, forgive us!"

"Don't let us desire impossibilities," said Wemyss, as he lifted his glass to his lips—"It is a sickness of the soul."

"Look at him drinking his own health."

"On the contrary, I am drinking my play's health. On its future I can have as little influence now as you."

"It will wing its flight high, I am sure," said Bertram.

"Till necessity brings it down," said Wemyss.

"Never mind," said Ellis, "necessity is the making of us. It is in reality the parent and founder of all men ever do: so says Rabelais."

"Well," said Wemyss, "I am going off to Paris for a holiday. When I come back I shall find, I dare say, much achieved, much done."

"Don't be long."

"You are always going off somewhere, Mr. Wemyss," said Margaret.

"Yes; I go, I think, I hunt, I enjoy myself, I work, I dream, I write—I succeed—then I come back again to my home—to London, I mean. They are all here just the same; young men and the young women; the worshipped beauties, the prostrate worshippers, the workers, the idle, doing just as before, in the same places, with the same thoughts, same ambitions, same faults, same chances of rising, same probabilities of falling. It is I who have flown; they are there at home. Poor creatures! do I not pity them? but after all it is our home."

"You should not go away, Mr. Wemyss. You should stay here and give us your help and influence to make the home better."

"I? what am I? a mere atom in this sea of humanity."

"And drops make the ocean, as man makes up humanity."

"Ah!" answered he, smiling to her, "how true it is that a great thought springs from the heart, but that wit has to go and fetch it."

One by one they all went away; at last only Bertram and Dudley Vane were left. Then

Bertram would have gone alone, but Margaret's eyes said as plainly as possible, "take him away," so Bertram said he was going his way, and they went together. Mrs. Hoffman and her daughter were left alone.

"Margaret, how beautifully you did it. I almost think," she added, with a little nervous laugh, "if this should go on you had better take to the stage."

"If what goes on?"

Mrs. Hoffman looked at her anxiously.

"I don't like to tell you to-night, when you have been so happy."

"I had rather you told me, mother."

Then Mrs. Hoffman came round to her, for before they had been facing each other; she came round the supper-table and laid her arm on her shoulder.

"Margaret, we cannot go on so. We are too poor. The end must come, has come. Debts and difficulties meet me at every turn, and I do not know where to look."

"Why did you not tell me sooner, mother?"

Mrs. Hoffman did not say she had indulged in extra magnificence lately, hoping to catch Dudley Vane's eye more securely; she had

some latent generosity perhaps, and just now she refrained from using Dudley's name.

"I did not want to make you unhappy or to spoil your play to-night. I thought perhaps things would mend——"

"Poor little mother," said the girl, putting her arm round her. "What shall we do?"

"We must go and live elsewhere, I think; and let the house, and sell the furni— Who is that?"

It was Dudley, who had shaken off Bertram Powys, and now returned, meaning to offer Margaret the bracelet he had bought for her; he had had no opportunity when the rest were all there.

"I thought I would just,"—said he. Then he saw something was the matter. How odd the sad faces of the two women looked, sitting amid the lights, and at the table where lately so gay a scene had taken place. The supper was still there: nothing had been cleared away.

"Will you excuse me for a moment, Mrs. Hoffman?" said he.

"Certainly, certainly, Sir Dudley."

And then he broke out impulsively:

"What is the matter?"

Mrs. Hoffman turned pale, but Margaret looked up at him, smiling.

"Let me tell him, Mutterlein. It is too serious for you to speak about."

So Mrs. Hoffman sat there, looking on. Dudley stood looking down in both faces.

"You see, Sir Dudley, if you had not come back, you would never have come back. You would only have found our place empty, and ourselves lost. But as you are here, listen. It seems we have been extravagant,—have nothing,—must go. Stop! listen! Must let the house, sell the furniture, go—go anywhere out of the world—I wonder, mother, would Russell Square, or Islington — I think Islington might do? It sounds cheap."

"What is it really, Mrs. Hoffman?" asked Dudley, looking from one to the other.

"I wish you would run away, Margot; then I could explain. You never will talk seriously about money."

Margaret rose, but unwillingly.

"Before you go, Queen Daisy, will you let me give you this? I came back to give it you."

A most brilliant bracelet it was. Margaret's

eyes glistened as she held it in her hand for a moment. Then she put it down softly.

"My friend, I cannot take it."

"Why not?" he exclaimed, wounded to the quick.

"Not now. We are so unequal. Not ever. Thank you for the thought of giving me pleasure all the same. Good-night."

She held out her hand to him and went away.

It might have been an hour after, when her mother came upstairs to her and found her sitting still undressed, looking over some manuscripts in her room.

"Margot, I want you."

Margaret rose at once.

"Why, mother, how pale you look. What is it?"

"Let me take breath, let me think." Then a moment after, she said, "He is still here."

"He is still here," repeated Margaret, mechanically. "What does he want?"

Her mother looked her in the face.

"You."

"Well, mother," said Margaret innocently, "what of that?"

"If you would just promise,"—the words came

out painfully laboured,—Mrs. Hoffman too for the moment was afraid of Margaret, "to be his wife, he would pay our debts, and get me out of all my difficulties, and our name would not be disgraced."

"Disgrace?" murmured Margaret.

"And we could—I could, stop in England," she went on speaking quickly, "and life would be smooth and happy again."

"Oh, mother," said the girl.

Her lip curled as she looked at her. Then she turned away and covered her face with her hands.

"He is waiting, child."

"Just go down and tell him to go away, mother. You neither of you thought, I know. We will say no more. Of course, I forgive it."

"Just think, child! Think of it. I could sleep again, I could hold up my head again, I could feel respectable once more. I could pay my way. He offered me the money, down now, to-morrow—was there ever such generosity? if you would truly be his wife. And of course I said you would."

"You said I would?"

"Yes. He is waiting. He thinks you love

him; he thinks you are going to him now happily——"

"Will you send him away?"

"May I tell him to come to-morrow instead? I will tell him—it is too late, we had such a long talk."

"Sooner than that, I will go myself, mother."

"Stop, child. Foolish girl! what are you doing? Stop, let me go."

But it was too late. Margaret had flown down-stairs. Mrs. Hoffman had better leave them alone.

He rose as she entered, a smile on his face such as Margaret had never seen before. There was a light playing in his eyes, the light of expectant love and of triumph.

She shut the door behind her, and made him a sign to stand where he was. In an instant his face clouded. There was no smile, no light; nothing but gloom.

"It was unworthy of you, of me, of our friendship," said she.

"Why? The money is nothing between us. Love makes us equal."

"I came down to say good-bye, to ask you to go away."

"It is all settled differently, Margaret; there is no choice for you now. You must marry me now. Your mother promised for you. She took my note of hand signed; I have her written promise."

Margaret could not believe her ears.

Then he tried to tell her more gently, but his tone was triumphant still, and every movement spoke of victory.

"And then, my girl, I am not an ogre? why should you not marry me?"

"My girl," repeated Margaret, more to herself than to him.

They both actually smiled.

Then she tried to teach him.

"I cannot marry you, because I do not love you. I cannot tell a story. More than all, I cannot live a lie. The money is nothing, you must give me back that signature of my mother's, she must give you back your note. You must go away—and—and—we——"

"Where will you go?" asked he, mockingly.

"We will go into the workhouse," said she, bitterly.

"Margaret, is my love nothing? do you think yours would not come? I do not understand life

without you. Is my happiness nothing at all? my whole life is yours, and we might be so happy."

"I cannot."

"You could make me what you like."

"I cannot."

"Who talked of self-sacrifice?"

"But this is false, wicked. I will not do it. Go—go, Dudley. You must go."

Her force excited him. Her very fear of him seemed to excite him more; he threw his arm round her and kissed her. The kiss seemed to change her nature. She seemed turned into stone; as white, as rigid as marble. It was his turn again to be frightened.

"I will go now," said he.

She did not answer, or speak to him.

"Will you not say good-night?"

"I will let you out," said she gravely.

On the stairs, he tried to put on some bravado. "He would come next day," he said. "Very early he would come. Would she be ready for him?"

She opened the street door, and stood silently there, as silently shut it; stood a moment thinking, and perhaps listening to his receding footstep, and then slowly, like a woman in a dream, went up to her room, and locked herself in.

CHAPTER VII.

Jacques. Life is arid, and terrible; repose is a dream, prudence is useless; mere reason alone serves simply to dry up the heart; there is but one virtue, the eternal sacrifice of oneself.

George Sand.

"WHY shouldn't you marry him?"

Margaret was sitting in the corner by the fire, huddled up in a shawl, for she had complained of the cold, and her mother had brought a little low chair, and was sitting close beside her. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning; Dudley might be here soon. Mrs. Hoffman held one of Margaret's hands in hers, and was playing with her fingers as she said this, "Why should not you marry him?"

"Put it the other way, mother; and why should I?"

"To save me from disgrace, from the imputation of having told an untruth, of having made a promise that I could not perform."

Margaret shuddered.

"You should not have done it."

"To get us out of our present difficulties, and enable us to hold up our heads honourably. Besides, to ensure comfort and happiness to yourself for the rest of your life, and to do something useful with your existence."

"Money does not make one happy, nor will a fine place and trees and a great house make one happy either."

"You might think of him a little."

"I cannot make him happy."

"Indeed you can, and you can make just what you like of him. His future entirely rests with you. For my part, I should think that something worth living for; to mould a man's life and character, and to improve it with my influence. Think of the position you will have in the county too, and the good you will be able to do with your money and your talent."

"I cannot do it, mother."

"You are so fond of yourself, Margaret. You always have been. I should have thought that when you saw your mother, your lover, and your own happiness all tending the same way, and waiting for one little word, that word would not

be very difficult to say, if only from a feeling of duty."

"Fond of myself!"

Margaret was stung to the quick. She did not know that was one of her faults. She only wanted to do what was right. This did not seem right. After all, was she wrong? Ought she really to sacrifice herself and her inclination?

"There is no real reason, you know, but some fanciful prejudice," continued Mrs. Hoffman. "You do not care for any one else?"

"No," half sobbed the girl.

The vision of Valentin that crossed her mind then, was nothing, must be nothing, she knew.

"Then you should do as you are told."

"It is for you, mother, only for you."

"Only for me. But it must turn out well for you, Margot; do say Yes to him. I told him you would; I said you loved him really, but that you held back because you were frightened. I said, I knew——"

"Oh, mother—don't."

She put her hands up to shut out the dreadfully false words.

For a while Mrs. Hoffman was silenced.

"I am sure I shall never make him happy."

"That is his affair."

"I am sure his relations will hate it."

"That is their affair."

"Perhaps, mother, he will not come back. I sent him away last night."

Mrs. Hoffman started, but she soon recovered herself.

"He is sure to come back—either to claim my promise or his money."

Margaret cowered nearer the fire, and wrapped the shawl closer round her.

"Cold, child?"

"Yes."

"Tired? You look ill. I dare say you did not sleep?"

"I never went to bed."

"Try to sleep now a little, so as to get a little colour. If he should come—— Well! but you have promised, Margot?"

"I have promised," said the girl.

She thought she had. Then her mother kissed her, and Margaret turned her face away as if she was going to try to sleep.

Mrs. Hoffman got up and glided out of the room.

Sleep! Was her mother mad? How could

one sleep, when one was sitting there like a condemned criminal, awaiting one's doom? Sleep! Death would be pleasant, but what would be the good of sleep, to wake up again and have a great wave of trouble coming over one again like a rush of the ocean?

Margaret got up from her chair, and walked up and down the room, trying to arrange her thoughts, trying to see clear. Honour! dishonour! Truth! untruth! How confused it all was! For the sake of the promise her mother had made, for the sake of her mother, in fact, because too of their difficulties and his generosity she was to give herself to him. Was that honour? Her mother said so. She was told that was her duty. Then, looking into the fire, she told herself that she had long known there was nothing but duty left to her in life; she had, alas! conjured up a vision for herself of late, she knew, of life—which should be lived in a free, independent, courageous, dutiful, hard-working, truthful fashion — containing duty and self-sacrifice, by the help of art and charity, and all the goodness and greatness of which she was capable. This sort of lying self-sacrifice and of fettering, bought duty had never occurred to her.

How distasteful it was! But, perhaps, its very nauseousness made it more necessary. Perhaps, after all, she had allowed her usual self-confidence to run away with her again. She wanted to follow out the road she had made for herself, instead of doing as she was told. Perhaps, thorough, entire self-sacrifice was the noblest, the truest thing she could do. Perhaps this was real. Perhaps the other was no sacrifice at all.

"How shall I do it? How shall I tell him?" thought she, half aloud, coming to a stand-still on the hearth-rug.

The fire had burnt itself into great red-hot cavernous hollows; the black coals in front looked like overhanging, frowning rocks and fathomless pits.

"It looks like hell," said she. "I feel as if I were walking straight into hell too."

Fritz, half asleep on the rug, yawned and stretched himself. Then composed himself to sleep again.

All at once a great terror came over Margaret. Where was she going? What would become of her?

"Is this life?" cried she, in an agony.

It was a cry after her young, happy life, over

which she had dreamed so much and so bravely, vanishing now so suddenly into the gloom of despair. It seemed to her as if all the light and glory of youth and hope, all the pride of life, all the strength and nobility of immortality had suddenly gone out, and there was nothing but the bare, dull reality of the terrible every-day present left.

Just then, too, like a sweet breath passing over her head, or like a bird's song heard in the far distance, when all around is still and sad, there came the memory of Valentin. A sense of his tenderness, of his smile,—a sense of the shelter his strength had been, a gleam of light from that far-off brightness.

"All false!" she said, the next moment. "It was not really fair, because it was not true. There is nothing true but self-sacrifice."

After that she sat still and rigid; not seeing anything, hardly thinking; waiting for her doom.

At last it came.

The door opened, and Dudley walked in.

How real it all seemed then. How strong and relentless fate is.

As for Dudley, he hardly knew then how it would be. Mrs. Hoffman had met him on the

stairs, and had told him Margaret was ready for him, but he doubted even then. He thought that Margaret had too much individuality not to rebel. He hoped passionately, but he hardly expected the consummation of his hopes. He did not know how Margaret would reason with herself, and did not think she would deem any sacrifice necessary, if it went against her inclination, just for the sake of her mother's name. He judged her by himself. If she accepted him, it would be, he thought, therefore, because she liked him, and was grateful for what he had done, not from any mistaken sense of honour.

If Margaret had known escape was yet possible, would she have met him like this?

She rose and walked across the room to him, and put her hands in his.

But quite gravely, only looking into his eyes, not smiling there.

"Is it so?" asked he, quickly. "Is it all right?"

She bent her head, she took her eyes away from his.

"It is all right."

Then he kissed her forehead, and she looked up at him shyly.

Something like the ghost of a smile flittered over her face. It was like the shadow of compassion on a wintry day. Was it pity for himself or for her?

"Shall we come to the fire?" asked she.

So they moved towards it together, and Dudley sat down by her, holding her hand in his.

"Shall we come to the fire?"

This is the every-day common-place talk with which we help ourselves through our life-tragedies: and we smile as our lips frame the familiar words.

But as she sat there Margaret saw the fiery caverns and fathomless depths still blazing before her, and she whispered to herself:

"I feel as if I were walking straight into hell."

CHAPTER VIII.

> How will he scorn! How will he spend his wit!
> How will he triumph, leap, and laugh at it!
> For all the wealth that ever I did see,
> I would not have him know so much by me!
>
> *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act iv. Sc. iii.

The god of laughter seemed to have taken possession of the house in Hans Place. At all hours—on the stairs, at the evening gatherings, wherever these intimates met—Margaret could find nothing but eternal smiles, eternal congratulations, eternal never-ending laughter. Was it real joy, real unfeigned gladness? Margaret wondered to herself. Or was it like Victor Hugo's "L'homme qui rit," ever-present, because they knew not what else to do or to say. If so, it was terrible. Anyhow, to Margaret it was terrible. She would meet the rest and laugh and smile because they did, and then she would go and shut herself up, and feel gloomy and sad, and feel inclined to cry. Amidst all that bright-

ness she was the only bit of gloom. It was the dread of the future that weighed on her so oppressively.

And she could tell no one, that was the hardest part of it. A hundred times a day she would have asked if she could was she doing right? was the sacrifice a fair one? But no one seemed to think there was any sacrifice; no one did anything but praise and smile and laugh and flatter, no one seemed occupied with any more serious thought than what his present should be, and no one would have answered Margaret fairly if she had asked.

If she could only have made a friend of Dudley, could only have explained something of her mingled feelings to him, if she could only have made him understand—have asked him about the nice points of truth and honour, and then, if he had been satisfied to take her so, have settled to walk hand in hand down the plain of life—— But these were day-dreams; Dudley never understood anything.

As for her mother, she did nothing but kiss her, and thank her in a thousand nameless ways, and whisper foolish words about her future happiness. Every day made escape more impossible.

Margaret was miserable. But such was the state of morbid feeling into which she had worked herself, the more miserable she was the more she thought she must be doing right. To give up one's own will utterly, to preclude to oneself all chance of happiness, to take up one's cross with such intense reality, must win one some reward at the end; so she reasoned. Yet, too, she really did try to find the bright side. She thought of what she was doing for her mother; she thought how she had yielded to Dudley, and she set herself to learn his character and to ensure his happiness. She dreamed how she would raise that character, what noble interests she would infuse into it; she imaged to herself through what paths of glory she would lead his life. What useful ambitions she thought of, what philanthropic ideals presented themselves to her fancy, what high work for humanity crossed her imagination in the picture of the future. These ideal aims almost made her happy. "All good people must be on her side," she thought. Her martyrdom seemed to have a ray from heaven resting on it then. Her life seemed transfigured in the life to come. This short human work-a-day life seemed nothing but a steep road soon

to be overcome, leading to the other. That seemed the reality, and this the dream.

After such thoughts work seemed easy, progress certain, the life bearable; and then she would rise strengthened, and join in the laughter of the rest.

Only their laughter was hideous, she thought; it was unreal, false, fleeting; depended on human enjoyments and costly creature luxuries. Her laughter had caught a strain from heavenly harmonies; in heaven such laughter could be echoed again.

It was odd, as Margaret seemed to gain strength and courage, Dudley seemed to shrink back. Whether it was some feeling like that which a hot-tempered obstinate child has, when it has been given some toy for which it stormed and cried, that after all it does not care so much about it; or whether it was that Margaret's superiority weighed sometimes upon him; or whether it was merely that the storm of anger which his engagement had excited among his relations frightened him, no one quite knew. But certainly he was subject now to fits of gloom and depression to which before he had seemed a stranger.

It could not be want of consideration. For

never had the literary stars and artistic geniuses who thronged Mrs. Hoffman's drawing-room paid him such deference before. He was even allowed to speak, and once or twice his extremely stupid remarks had provoked smiles. Who knew but soon perhaps one of them might be honoured with an answer?

How often Margaret wondered what they must think of her—these clever men, who had risen so high by their talents, whose dearest treasure was their independence, and who would sooner bear any poverty and any privation than part with their freedom of spirit. Must they not scorn and despise her?

But they did nothing but congratulate. Whatever they thought, they had one and all been too well tutored by Mrs. Hoffman to dream of exposing any shadow of scorn to Margaret.

And soon Margaret found the best way to avoid their contempt was to make them believe in her admiration for Dudley. They would condone bad taste; they would forgive an irrepressible passion even if the object of it were "bad form," or hopelessly stupid—(is not feminine caprice proverbial? and is not every one supposed to prefer one's contrast?)—but they would never feel

aught but scorn for a miserable barter or bargain; for the sacrifice of truth and happiness for miserable money, which after all is but a luxury, can so easily be done without, and is only wanted every now and then for a trip abroad, or for some exceptional case, or for some urgent case of charity. To make the whole of life subservient to gold would indeed win their severest reprobation.

So Margaret's smiles to Dudley were more frequent, and her laughter was softer, and in consequence, happiness and peace seemed at length possibilities to all.

Duty seemed arrayed in a garb of glory to Margaret at last, and her straining eyes and yearning hands seemed ready to be content with the moderate prizes she might give.

"My dear, you are happy," said Mrs. Hoffman suddenly in a fit of enthusiastic delight one evening; "say you are happy now; that you are going to be happy?"

"I think I shall, mother."

And she smiled quietly to herself over the happiness she was going to mould to her will.

Already Dudley was improving, she thought. He showed interest in all sorts of things which he had never noticed before. He had more life,

more energy. "Life," he said, "was quite different from what he had thought it was."

He drove Margaret about to do her shopping, to see sights; they went to plays, to music together. Her horizon also expanded. She too began to think life need not be dull, even if it were not what one expected. Dudley was not much. You could not possibly make a hero of him, or was he an ideal of any sort, but then, who was? Heroic ideals always turned out false. And then Valentin would flash across her brain, and she would turn to Dudley with a sort of relief, and be thankful that you saw the worst of him at once, and that there was no best to take you in.

Perhaps, too, the difficulties and perplexities they had, brought them closer together. Dudley was for ever doing kindnesses to Mrs. Hoffman, and in the midst of it all he was always pulled the other way by his own relations. Mrs. Vane called the Hoffmans a couple of adventuresses; opposition in every way was made to the match; even Mr. Tudor was sent for from abroad, and asked to reason with Dudley, to go to Mrs. Hoffman and explain how distasteful the marriage would be to the Vanes; even Mrs. Vane called

upon Mrs. Hoffman, and was openly and decidedly rude to that lady in her own house, but Dudley was a model of faithful constancy. Margaret could not choose but feel grateful.

Nothing in fact could be done. Dudley was of age, Froghambury was his; he had the game in his own hands; if he had chosen to marry his cook or a crossing-sweeper, no one could have prevented him. He was disappointed that his mother had not fallen in love at first sight with Margaret, and he said so to Mrs. Hoffman.

"I never knew any mother do that with a daughter-in-law, unless she had a great deal of money," answered that astute lady.

"But, Margaret?" exclaimed he.

"The fact is, she does not want you to marry at all; not even an angel from heaven. She does not want to be turned out of Froghambury."

This seemed a new idea to Dudley.

The next day he came to Margaret, when she was working by the fire.

"I say, Queen Daisy, I have something to ask you."

"Yes."

She put down her work and looked into his face.

"Of course, say No if you don't like it. It doesn't matter. I only thought I'd ask——"

"Yes, Dudley. What is it?"

"Would you much mind my mother living at Froghambury with us?"

Margaret paused for a moment. Dudley was facing her, and looking very awkward. "After all," thought she, quickly, "Dudley is not much of a companion. It might be nice to have some woman to talk to."

"Would you like it, Dudley?"

"Yes, I should. If you thought you two could get on?"

"I can always get on with women."

"I think she might not oppose our marriage so much, if she thought we should not turn her out of Froghambury."

"Then ask her to stay, by all means."

"You are a brick, Queen Daisy. By-the-by," he added, turning back again, "would you like to think it over first—to ask your mother her opinion?"

A shade crossed Margaret's face, as she thought that her mother would be sure to tell her to say no; "and Dudley must be my life now," she continued to herself, "and his happiness, not mine or my mother's."

"No, I think," she said aloud, taking up her work again, "we need not mention it to my mother at all; it is our affair, not hers."

Dudley went away immensely relieved, and wondered how any one could ever say a word against Margaret. Was there ever such a sweet disposition allied with so much beauty? How was it that the fates had been so individually kind to him in taking him to Sonnenthal and enabling him to find her?

Mrs. Vane was staying at an hotel in London, so as to be on the spot, and to be enabled to frustrate more successfully the schemes of the Hoffmans. To her, now, Dudley went. Mr. Tudor was sitting with her. Evidently a council of war was going on.

"Well, mother," said Dudley, throwing himself into an arm-chair (Mr. Tudor had the other one, and Mrs. Vane was sitting bolt upright at a writing-table), "have you been out to-day?"

"Out? No, I have not. I have no time or spirit for anything."

"You look full of spirit, my dear madame."

"And much use it is. Dudley, my boy, have you thought this over?"

Dudley rose.

"Look here, mother, I may as well say Good-bye at once if you are going on that tack. Thought it over, of course I have; and nothing you can say, and not all the parsons in the world can alter it."

"I was afraid so," said Mr. Tudor.

"You, at least, Mr. Tudor, know her well, and cannot say a word against her," said Dudley, sitting down again.

"She is charming; personally—charming," said he warily; thinking that, probably, one day Margaret might be his chief Lady Bountiful in his parish, and that it therefore behoved him to be careful. But still, had not the present lady her eagle eye upon him. "But——" added he.

"You see, mother, you could do anything with Margaret. She is so good-tempered. And she is so clever, and does such a lot of things. I am sure you would delight in her."

Mrs. Vane sighed, shook her head, and buried her face in her handkerchief.

"You could do anything in the world with her," said Mr. Tudor, softly. "As you will see when she comes to live at Froghambury."

A corner of the handkerchief was lifted, and a sob was arrested half way.

"I am sure you two might be first-rate companions for each other. It will be nice for you to have some one, I should think. You often say Froghambury is dull."

"Very."

"And she will play to you, and sing to you, and drive with you."

Mrs. Vane shuddered, but the handkerchief was taken away, and a light smile played about her mouth.

"After all, I could do what I liked with her?"

"Of course you could," said Mr. Tudor.

"A child. A mere chit. A—— I mean," catching Dudley's eye, "a charming daughter."

After all, it was not a very gracious way to take the offer. There was no gratitude, no motherly kiss for the concession; but on the whole Dudley thought he had done right, and that his mother looked happier.

That afternoon, when he was driving Margaret, he told her about it.

"But don't let us worry ourselves," added he. "Things are sure to fit in somehow."

"I am sure they will," said she, hopefully.

They were driving in the park at the time. Who was that walking along in front? Margaret

had never seen a figure or a walk so like Valentin's before. How slow the horses were in catching the young man up; and when they did she probably would not see his face, for he was looking down.

"What a cold afternoon it is," said Dudley, looking round at her. "Are you wrapped up enough? This driving rain is not pleasant. Had not I better turn round and go home?"

"Oh no; go on. I like it so much."

Dudley laughed.

"We do not care. We are happy and warm enough."

"Yes; warm enough," repeated she.

Now they were on a level with him, now—he was putting up his umbrella; Margaret could not see; she turned round and looked.

Out of the gloom of that February afternoon there faced her the one man she had loved—Valentin von Broderode.

The horses tore on; her heart stood still. By slow degrees her presence of mind came back to her; and she stooped to re-adjust the fur rug.

Dudley looked down laughing into her face.

"Warm enough," you said. "Are you happy enough too?"

"Yes," said she, smiling brightly—brighter than ever before; "so happy."

She stamped her foot at the falsehood.

"What an actress I am," said she to herself. "I did not know it before."

As they flew through the wind and rain she tried to think it all over. Had he seen her? Oh, yes, he had; their eyes had met. How reproachful they looked. But there had been no sign of recognition. How proud he must have thought her, prancing by in her furs—sitting by Dudley. He must have seen, must know it all now.

And what must he think of her?

Were they not quits?

If he had been false, was she not false too?

Was this right? Need she have fallen because he had? Should she not have been true always?

What must he think of her?

Should she never see him again?

She looked at every one she saw, seeking that grave, handsome face again.

By and by they came back by the same road where she had seen him.

There, on the very same spot, as though he

had not moved, as though he felt neither wind or rain, there stood Valentin.

She saw him from a long, long way off.

How she hated the horses, the carriage, the bright harness—everything. How she hated to be driving by him, Valentin, like this, and to have to feel him standing there. How she longed to be able to get out, and to crawl up to him, and say "Forgive me."

And then, all at once, the thought came to her rescue—

"He is false, he always was false."

So, though her cheek paled, her eye was firm. Ay! firm enough she met his gaze, and never flinched or smiled. A long, long look. To each it seemed a life-time, to each it told a history.

He stood looking after her, and the horses bore her away.

Dudley was talking to them; he said they were pulling like the ——

"So she is false," said Valentin to himself, as he turned on his heel at last.

"If—if—I wonder—if only he had been true," she was saying to herself; "but I could not bear it now."

CHAPTER IX.

But, oh! how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes.

As you like it, Act v. Sc. 2.

Valentin von Broderode had left Sonnenthal vowing he would forget Margaret. He was one of those who believed so firmly in himself that he thought that he had but to issue the decree, and strength to do whatsoever might be desirable would come. His life had hitherto been passed in sunshine; if ever clouds had seemed to fleck the sky, he had but to frown and to manifest his displeasure, and fate had incontinently waved them away. Then, Margaret had first fixed his wandering fancy. Now, he thought, there will be no more change, no more caprice, no more weariness. Lotta had been a youthful dream, an illusion, nothing more. But Margaret was worthy of the best, the purest devotion; eternal faith, a joy for ever. He believed in her

thoroughly, he worshipped her with the whole passion of his heart.

But then, at last, when she made no word or sign, when she refused to see him, and when she did not even (so he thought, for Lotta prevented his getting her letter) wish to bid him good-bye; when, therefore, that dream too must fade, then his soul turned in anger against her, and he vowed he would forget her.

He railed to himself against her and her falsehood, he magnified her offence, he lost all faith in womanhood, all faith in life. Everything that had been sweet he turned to bitter; everything he had thought to love he taught himself to hate.

But this was not forgetting.

It was simply poisoning the happy hours that were fled, simply defacing the image of the soft memory of the past; and through it all his soul longed with a longing past description for that faded past once more.

How the thousand words and tones haunted him; how the idle hours they had spent together were for ever present with him. And how he cursed his foolish self-confidence that he had trusted so blindly to the future, and had never

bound Margaret to him with a promise or solemn word.

What were smiles and blushes and happy looks? What to live on? Faith writ in water, which eddies away with the changing surface. He might have known that no woman understood honour, or steadfastness, or could understand at all what lasting affection meant.

So he thought bitterly to himself; but this was not forgetting Margaret.

Why had he gone on in that foolish dalliance, just playing with life and fate? why had happiness and Margaret's eyes seemed to him so sure, so true? why had he enjoyed his blind trust? why had he laughed in his heart at the uncertainty and perplexity he saw he inspired? and why, just for very pride's sake, had he gone laughing on? Because fortune had smiled upon him hitherto, would she always smile upon him? Why had he believed in her so implicitly?

So by degrees he learnt his lesson; and by degrees too he became a changed man.

No longer the spoiled darling of fortune's favour, he saw himself a disappointed labourer in the world's husbandry. No longer the centre of the cares and hopes of ministering spirits, he saw

himself, like other men, bound to work and to strive for any desired object. But he did not take the lesson kindly. It had come upon him too suddenly, with too much harshness for that; the awakening was too bitter for him not to greet it with angry resentment. He did not see that other men had learnt the lesson long ago, and that only his own idle wilfulness had kept him blind. He did not see that nearly all other men around him were working against fate, or rather against the consequences of their own folly or their own mistakes; and that no one of them believed as he chose to believe, that fate worked with them, connived at their idleness, and contrived that, whatever their follies, still they would always turn up trumps, and always win. He began now to learn too much bitterness. He thought that against him alone fate now vowed vengeance. He thought that other men prospered where he alone was defeated. He thought there were no pleasant paths for him in life,—no warm hearts, no friendships, no successes, because fate was unjust, and that he must strive with all his might to cheat fate. Certainly he learnt the lesson, though so late that if he wished to have plums in his mouth he must open it; but it

struck him that it was necessary that he should open his mouth wider than any other person, because fate was unkind to him, and would prevent him from getting his plums if she possibly could. Certainly he learnt that we must test our friends and the objects of our love, and not take too much on trust, or believe too fondly that because we worship, our devotion, as a natural sequence, will be met by equal affection. Certainly he learnt that; and he vowed he would take no woman's love on trust again; but then, he thought, at the same time, that never had woman's eyes seemed so true as Margaret's, and proved so false; never had any man been so foully, so shamefully deceived as he had. And so learning he fell to brooding over it all again, and wondering why Margaret had proved false, and wishing passionately that only she might have been true.

And this was not forgetting Margaret.

But he would never trust again.

"A burnt child fears the fire," and that winter in Berlin might have seen him flickering round many fires, kindling many a flame, but screening himself all too surely from any too bright a blaze.

He became prudence and diplomacy and worldliness personified; hard-hearted too, save for his woes. And over these he brooded when he came back from the balls and from the assemblies of the gay society he frequented, as though no one but himself had known sorrow before.

Over Lotta's letters, too, he pondered; very tender they were, as though the writer were conscious he bore some mark of trouble on his soul; and pondering, sometimes he wondered if she were true. "Ah, no!" he would conclude, with his newly-found wisdom, "such an one cannot care. She only wants to mend her broken life, and retrieve a lost position."

He had even written to Margaret about Christmas-time; but what was the good? Could he send it anywhere but to Blumenthal; and had not Lotta kindly undertaken the office of sending on any letters there might be? Having burnt Margaret's note to Valentin, was it unlikely that she would burn his to Margaret?

So misunderstandings built up barriers of pride and of unhappiness, and a strange corroding bitterness took possession of Valentin's mind. His relations and friends became anxious about

him; all his high spirits, his merry, ringing laugh seemed to have left him; sharp sarcasms were heard in their place. Gaiety and amusement seemed to please him no longer, society seemed to weary; society seemed, in fact, but a butt for gibes and scorn.

Then some one suggested change, travel; and with the suggestion Valentin seemed to start into life.

"He would go to England," he thought; "he would find Margaret, face her, throw her falsehood in her teeth, and prove it. Then he could breathe more freely."

It was February before he managed to get his leave, and, then sending a hurried note of adieu to the disappointed Lotta, who had begun to think that he had learnt at last to love her, with hasty farewells to his intimates in Berlin, he left for London.

He took up his residence in an hotel in Soho Square; it had been recommended to him by a countryman. And then he began to wander about in search of Margaret.

But London seemed to him enormous; and he knew not where to go.

It was an errand of hatred on which he was bound, and he used to say to himself that

revenge should lend wings to his steps. He might as well have acknowledged bravely that it was feverish love that had brought him, and that now led him about.

In the morning he used to set forth hopefully, cheerfully; but the whirl and roar of the seemingly-limitless world of London wearied him, and how despairing and dispiritless was the mood in which he returned!

Directories and guide-books he studied by the dozens, but none of the Hoffmans therein inscribed were his Hoffmans. People who hire houses do not figure as the inmates of their landlords' houses. That also with other things Valentin had yet to learn.

How cold and dreary and oppressively gloomy this London seemed. Valentin could hardly fancy his bright, though false, Margaret could be a denizen of it. Its gloom and its size weighed upon him drearily. Three or four times he found himself philosophizing on death and suicide: he thought he understood now how people were so tempted to it.

Then, at last, that afternoon in the park, out of the dark and the gloom and the driving rain, had started Margaret.

Seated there in her furs and wraps, being drawn by two prancing bays, and—driven by Dudley, this false woman had passed him.

What a revelation it was.

It was like a ghost from a land of happiness.

It was the spectre of reality, when the dream of beauty was dispelled.

So she was really, truly false.

Perhaps he had never thoroughly believed it till now.

Now there was no doubt.

And she had seen him.

What a grave, sad, inquiring look it was.

It haunted him.

It troubled him so that he stood there like a man in a dream, rooted to the spot, hardly conscious, hardly thinking. It was as if he had been struck.

The same face he had loved so madly, the same eyes that had smiled into his so fondly—was she false? was she really false?

How he longed to find her true.

She looked so noble, so calm, so self-possessed, so beautiful—she must be true.

Yet, there it was, proof positive. What was the good of thinking about it?

She was being driven by Dudley.

The thought was madness in his brain.

He stood combating it.

At that moment he really hated her.

Had he gone away then straight back to Germany, he had been cured. Embittered he might have been, but he would have loved Margaret no more.

But he stood there with the thought.

And then the pained look in her eyes came back to him, and he pitied her.

Yes; out of the intensity of his grief, this great-hearted man found pity for her who had pained him so.

The pity saved him: who knows, perhaps, has saved his soul in eternity?

He stood there compassionate, sorrowful, stricken.

And then we know how she came by him again.

But this time she looked proud, haughty, hard.

It was, after all her yearnings, her longing for his truth, her thirst for his voice and for his forgiveness—it was the thought, "He is false," that made her look so.

And his heart was hardened against her.

But the pity thrilled there too.

As he stood there looking after the carriage, wondering—just daring to wonder—whether she would not look back, the thought came to him—as it might of some wilful child who would do wrong:

"If she knew, if only she knew——"

This sort of compassion was new to the impulsive Valentin; it had come to him with the sorrow he had gone through.

When we have felt anguish very sharply ourselves, we would stop others from dealing wounds around if we could.

"Married to Dudley Vane! Wife to Dudley Vane."

The thought went whirling on in his brain.

"So this is what he had come from Germany to see."

It must be so, for her to be driving about thus.

She had married the boy she had despised, the boy at whom they had often laughed together, the boy whom she had just tolerated.

Just because he was rich——

The ideal had fallen indeed. So, on near

inspection, this was what his deity really innately was.

It was sickening.

No wonder her eyes looked grave; no wonder there was a haunting pain in them.

Had he not better go back to Germany? Had he not seen enough? This was what all her fine phrases, all her pure sentiment had come to. This was the meaning of her bright smiles and her joyous laughter: she had but been playing him off against Dudley. She had meant to marry Dudley all along.

How could he have believed in her ever?

If only he had not saved Dudley's life, then how had it been? Then failing any one else, she might have been true to him. His impulsive act had been wrong. A generous impulse is always wrong, weak, foolish.

So he decided; and then thought that that sort of truth, failing any one else, was not worth much. Better Dudley should have it than he.

Should he not go back to Germany now to-day, having seen the truth, and drop out of their lives, and tear them out of his, and never set eyes on her false face again?

He was half decided.

Then the insane impulse to meet her once, to accuse her boldly, to throw her falsehood in her teeth, took hold of him once again. He would do it once. Chance fate would favour him just once.

For days he wandered about; seeing pictures here, dining there, seeing what he could now of military affairs, now of artistic collections; frequenting the theatres now and again, but always haunting the park at the hour and the spot where Margaret had passed him.

In vain; she never came.

At last, one day, he was wandering purposelessly in the South Kensington Museum, when a voice attracted his attention.

Looking up, opposite him, seen through the double-glass of the case he had been inspecting, was Margaret's face.

Their eyes met.

She did not seem to falter, or blush, or tremble, or even to look away, as he expected her guilty soul would force her to do.

She turned deadly pale.

And he stood looking there; pale too, but firm, and terrible, and cruel, and hard. A very Nemesis.

It was more like two deadly foes meeting, than the meeting of two who had cared so madly for each other.

Then she smiled; and with the smile, the colour came back to her face.

He stood immovable there.

She was going to speak to him. He was not sure how he should be able to bear it.

But she turned to Dudley first.

"Ah! had they been alone," thought Valentin. "This shadow at her side was terrible."

"Dudley," said she, bringing him to the spot where she was standing, "look! I have found an old friend." Laughing, she pointed through the glass as she spoke. "I think now I must go and thank him for your life more than ever. I should not have had you now, if he had not saved you from the cruel Rhine, should I?"

They were the best, the safest words she could have chosen. They dealt a stab to each of the young men. They left her mistress of the situation.

Dudley coloured, and hurried round to Valentin.

Valentin was forced to smile, and to raise his hat.

But Dudley and Valentin shook hands first,

and Margaret came slowly, and smiling—and so, met him last after all.

"We must thank these snuff-boxes for having kept us and helped us to find each other."

"Yes," said Valentin. "I was surprised indeed."

"Fancy your being in England," said Dudley.

"Have you been here long?"

"No, not long. I saw you the other da—"

"You see me now in my mother-country," said she, "and I am getting very English. Soon," looking nervously at Dudley, "I shall be quite English."

"Yes," said he. "So I——"

Then he stopped.

Were they married? or were they not?

Before, he had thought so. Now he did not feel quite sure.

Margaret did not look at him; she did not seem as if she would look at him full in the face.

Then Dudley asked after every one at Sonnenthal.

But Valentin said he knew nothing.

Then he found Margaret's eyes fixed on him.

Presently, she was standing slightly apart looking at some miniatures; he came to her side.

"You would ask something?" asked he.

"No; at least yes; how is Frau Senden?"

"I do not know."

Their eyes met, and Margaret's fell.

As for him, he laughed.

"And you?"

"I am going to marry Dudley Vane."

Her eyes were never raised to his; her face did not change, or express anything.

A moment later and Dudley stood between them.

How long was it that half-hour, during which they wandered to and fro there?

Not another word or look could Valentin get from Margaret; all her smiles, all her jests and playful rejoinders were for Dudley. And how ignorant he was. What stupid things he said. How absolutely ignorant he was of painting, and of china, and of all the objects of civilization.

What "pearls before swine" were these that Margaret threw.

Valentin thought it was too painful, that he could not bear it. Certainly she was false; she had evidently herself made the bargain, and had been contented with the sale of herself. Certainly he himself could never again love her, or anything

so false as she was. But still the degradation was dreadful. This match of Beauty and the Beast was terrible. It ought not to be allowed. Some one ought to tell her.

The bare fact of Dudley Vane winning such beauty, such happiness, was an anachronism.

Valentin knew it should have been his. He could have appreciated her, could have loved her. Ah! why had she not been true! This was bitterness past all speaking to see her lost thus.

Was it too late? Was there not yet time?

CHAPTER X.

Unchanged within to see all changed without
Is a blank lot and hard to bear, no doubt.—*Coleridge.*

Valentin was not slow in taking advantage of the somewhat careless invitation which Margaret had given him, that he should come to Hans Place to see her mother and herself.

The very next day after the meeting at the South Kensington Museum, Mrs. Hoffman was alone in her little drawing-room, when Gretchen announced Valentin.

She was in fact contemplating a very handsome bracelet which Dudley had given to Margaret, and a soft smile lay on her face as she looked it over, and then put it on her lap to enjoy its sparkling beauty. Just then Valentin walked in, and a startled expression crossed the triumph which had been written on her face. But she was too clever to let it stay long enough to catch

his eye. She rose at once, the bracelet in her hand, and greeted him with the softest smile and the most flattering of welcomes.

"This is good of you; it is kind and true indeed. You have come to us at once, first, straight?"

"At once?" echoed Valentin, questioningly, and trying to wriggle his hand out of hers. "I hardly know——"

"It was but yesterday Margot met you. I was so glad to hear you were in London. This is friendship indeed to have come to us so soon; and you must have so many calls upon your time, so much to do, and to see. Where will you sit?"

Then she wheeled a chair for him near to hers, letting go of his hand at last.

"And you have come to congratulate me, I am sure? To wish us joy? You are a true friend, indeed."

"Yes, Frau Hoffman. It is so, is it not? Of course I wish you joy. You are, I do not doubt, very happy?"

"Well, I can hardly say that, you know. I know your kindness, and I am sure you will sympathize. I am the victim of such mingled feelings."

"Yes; certainly, you and I have had many a laugh at Vane."

"Oh, not that!" she put up her hand deprecatingly, "I do not mean that. All that is altered now; he is so much improved—happiness improves him, I suppose."

"Or money, perhaps?"

"Well, as you say, it might be money perhaps. That does improve people too."

"Oh, certainly."

"But when I spoke of my mingled feelings, I meant for myself and for her, dear child. You can fancy, or rather you can't fancy, what the separation will cost me. Oh, it will be dreadful."

Then, for a moment, and careful not to disarrange her well-arranged face, she covered it with her handkerchief.

"You will not live with them?"

"I? no. That never does. And then, too, his mother is to be with them at Froghambury. Of course, both Mrs. Vane and myself would be too much."

"Ah, yes. And do you know Mrs. Vane; is she nice?"

He said it for something to say, failing arrival

at the point he desired to reach. In truth, he cared not what Mrs. Vane was like at all.

"Know her? Oh yes; I know her. And I do not mind telling you, but she is a monster. A hard, cold-blooded, selfish woman of the world."

"Your poor daughter."

"Yes! Oh, but Margaret seems to get on very well with her. She manages her somehow; I cannot. And then she is very fond of Margaret."

"And so your daughter is very happy?"

He said it constrainedly, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and twirling his hat in his hand as he spoke.

"Happy? Oh, she is a different being. Happy is not the word for it. Did not you see it on her face?"

"No."

"No? well, men don't notice these things. But she is so joyous and glad and trustful, that I too must be happy. For her sake, I too must be glad; and I must manage to forget my poor self somehow altogether."

Again the handkerchief was in requisition.

"When are they to be married?"

"Next month, early in the month."

"And they have been long engaged?"

"Oh no! not long; some weeks."

"You met him?"

"Oh no! he found us, he followed us. It was all his own unaided doing. Of course, in my position, I could do nothing. All the advances must come from him. I wonder at it now when I think it over."

"You rather gave him to understand, in fact——"

"Oh yes; what could I do? a poor widow here. I was forced to hold back, and in our small circumstances, I could not think it advisable for him,—I wonder now how his relations have agreed? but would you believe it, Valentin, they have received her with open arms."

"Have they?"

"Yes; he was determined, determined. One cannot help admiring him for it."

Then there fell a silence between them. Valentin began to understand how foolishly he had lost her. Why had he not been more determined? why had he flirted so foolishly? why had he dallied so wantonly with his happiness, instead of grasping it firmly when it was within his reach?

"You saw it of course, all the time?"

She took a long covert look at him, before she asked this.

"What?"

"Why, Dudley and Margaret! I mean at Sonnenthal, in the old days, the first days of our acquaintance?"

"No."

"Oh, I did. I saw it all along. We all saw it. I thought you saw it too. You played into their hands so beautifully."

"I played into their hands?"

"Yes; so kindly. With your open, unpretending friendship that meant nothing at all; diverting suspicion so nicely, making Dudley so causelessly jealous, and just fanning the flame, you know, so judiciously. No match-making mamma could have done it better."

"Yes," said he.

She could not see his eyes, or his expression. But she saw the swift colour mount to his face, and she feared she had gone too far.

"They will be very happy together," said she.

"Will they?"

"You must come and see them together, and judge for yourself. You must come often."

Then he rose to go. He was in truth too

angry, too bewildered to sit there facing his tormentor any longer.

"You will like to see how happy we all are."

It was in reality almost a prayer to him not to destroy that happiness, not to stain her hard-won triumph.

"For," she added, falteringly, "you are one of us, and you will share our happiness too."

"I shall come again very soon. Meanwhile, I wish you happiness from the bottom of my heart, and I congratulate you sincerely."

Then he turned and went, and Mrs. Hoffman was left alone.

"How unfortunate," said she to herself, walking to the fire and then back again to the window. "How extremely unfortunate, that he should have come just now. Oh, if he should dash all my plans to the ground, and destroy my successful schemes. If—Margaret—oh, she must not see him—must never know that he cares for her. He does care for her. I see it in his face. I wonder how it all fell out, and why he did not speak before. If I had known—but no, it would never have done. He is nothing, absolutely nothing, compared with Dudley, in a worldly

way. Oh no! It was better that I did not know: I have done quite right."

She poked the fire, and took up the bracelet again, and sat herself down comfortably, yet with a more anxious expression on her face than it had worn before Valentin's entrance.

About half-an-hour afterwards she heard a light step on the stairs, and Margaret entered hastily.

"Oh, mother, we have had such a long rehearsal, Bertram Powys and I. He gets more absurd every day. But we have been working so hard, we must succeed."

"'As you like it,' is such an ambitious choice. Whatever made you choose it?"

"I am sure I don't know. They thought our farewell entertainment ought to be something special. And then you know we only choose a few scenes out of it."

"I hope Dudley will approve?"

"I hope he will, I am sure, as he is so magnificent and generous about it."

"Mind that we introduce him to everybody."

"Oh, certainly. As the giver of the feast, and as *mon futur*."

"As much your '*futur*' as you like, but I

think you need not say he is the giver of the feast."

"Why? everybody will know we could not give it."

"But still we need not say so. It might put him in a false position, and might make people think his money was an object in the marriage."

Margaret laughed, as she looked straight at her mother.

Mrs. Hoffman could not prevent a slight tinge of colour over-spreading her face.

"That would be a pity, mother."

"Yes."

"Dudley seems to like the whole thing so much. I never thought he would take so much interest in any play-acting."

"He is so proud of your talent. And now that he feels you are his, he is not jealous any more."

"I wonder what he will think of my dress as Rosalind?"

"Well, dear, I really think we have managed it quite admirably. It is graceful as well as——"

"Decent! say the word, Mutterlein. Well, I hope it is. I can only say I hope it is."

"Mrs. Ellis said it was. And Miss Powys was charmed with it."

"Oh yes; 'Celia' (that is her name in the play, you know) likes it, and says I make a charming Ganymede. Touchstone said he lost his heart to my ancles, and found himself wishing I was a girl, and Bertram Powys said he had never realized the difficulties of Orlando's supposed ignorance before."

"You seem to have found a little time to laugh, notwithstanding your very hard work."

"And what have you been doing, mother?"

"I? Oh! I have had a visitor."

"Who?"

Margaret had been looking at herself carelessly in the glass as she spoke. Now she turned and faced her mother, for Mrs. Hoffman did not answer at once.

"Valentin von Broderode has been here."

The girl changed colour as she looked at her mother's impenetrable face.

"So soon! Did he really come? It was only yesterday——"

"I know," said Mrs. Hoffman, curtly. In fact Margaret's earnestness frightened her. She wished she could push the man and the whole subject

away from her. "It was only a call of ceremony. He happened to be passing."

But meanwhile a mad thought shot through Margaret's mind.

"Perhaps after all he was not false, perhaps after all he cared; he might have come to England, as she used to think he would, to see her."

"It is too late now," said she aloud.

She said it really to herself, in a soft, sad, questioning tone. She had not meant it for her mother. It was but a regret for her freedom. If only she had a chance, if only she could fairly discover his motives—that was what she meant. And if only, after all, her worship could turn out to be true, her ideal to be true—if only Valentin should not have been false after all. Then truth and happiness and goodness might exist on the earth again after all.

She was standing at the window looking out into the square as she said it:

"It is too late now."

Her mother started up and stood beside her, laying her hand on her arm.

"What do you say?"

Margaret turned her eyes to her face like one

in a dream, then slowly, as if fully awake, she sighed, and said in a low voice:

"Nothing, mother."

But she withdrew herself from Mrs. Hoffman's touch, and walking away threw herself into a chair, the picture of desolate misery.

For some minutes nothing was heard in the room but the ticking of the clock, and once the fire, as though impatient of its limits or of the stillness, fell in with a crash.

The feeling Margaret showed was a revelation to Mrs. Hoffman. Hitherto, since the night when the sacrifice had first been demanded of her, Margaret had uttered no word of regret or repining. Chance looks there might have been; a stray glance, an effort too visible; but of late even these had been controlled. In her determination, that if she made up her mind to marry Dudley, she would also make up her mind to love him too, and if she failed in that, to make at least every one think so,—and she had sought no confidence,—she had so far succeeded that not only did their acquaintances and friends think she was perfectly happy, but Dudley also thought so, and Mrs. Hoffman was certain of it. There had been no word of recrimination, not one word

of regret; she was accomplishing the sacrifice cheerfully.

"For," said she to herself, "I do it for my mother. How can I do it if she sees me crying every day, or if she knows that poverty would be no pain at all in comparison. But she wrote her promise, she made her compact, and I must fulfil it for her sake as honourably as I may."

But now when Mrs. Hoffman saw Margaret sitting utterly dejected and miserable in a chair, all the past rose before her with terrible reality, and she asked herself if in truth the cost was too much for the girl? But now it was too late. Cost what it might the bargain must be concluded.

"I thought all that nonsense was over," said she at last.

"I said it was nothing. I am tired. I was thinking."

Then there was another silence.

"Do not think."

Margaret rose with an action of despair. "Was this woman for whose honour she was sacrificing her life worth it?" That was the thought then boiling in her brain.

"No; you are right. I must not think. I

cannot think. If I do, I shall throw it all to the winds. I must go straight on, do what I am told, and never know whether it is wrong or right. After all, where is right? What is honour? If I save yours I risk mine; if I save yours I endanger Dudley's? How many lies have you and I told during the last weeks for the sake of one you told one night? Love him! good heavens, I hated him then, and you knew it."

"But not now, child; not now," said Mrs. Hoffman softly.

The hypocritical look and expression recalled Margaret to herself. She became calm at once. Once more she put on her mask; once more she reached out for her old deception.

"Not now, as you say, not now."

"So it has ended well."

"All's well that ends well," and Margaret bowed her head.

"I will leave you alone, child, now."

And she walked towards the door.

"What did he say, mother? what did he say?"

She was walking after her mother. Her earnestness was piteous.

"Nothing much. He just came and sat there and twirled his hat, and went away."

"Was that all?"

"He came to congratulate, and to say he was sure you would be happy."

"Was that all?"

"And I told him how happy you were, and how long it had been going on."

"You said that?"

"And I told him the beginning of it at Biberich, at Sonnenthal I mean, and I said how we all used to watch it, and I asked him if he did not see it."

"Well?"

"No. He swore he had not seen it. And I thanked him—I am afraid that was mischievous of me——"

"Thanked him?"

"Yes. For his match-making qualities; told him how useful he had been, always there, yet never in the way; just making Dudley jealous, and, of course, at the end, just bringing him to the point. No mother could have done it like that."

"You told him that?"

"Yes. Failing his having come forward

himself, I thought he might as well know that he had done us a good turn nevertheless. Why, Margaret, why do you look like that?"

"And what did he say?"

"Say! Nothing. He went away. But he looked angry, or, at least, much as you do now."

"So I am angry. I am disgusted."

Mother and daughter understood each other now.

Mrs. Hoffman held the handle of the door in her hand.

"I did it for your sake. He must never know you cared for him. It is too late now."

Then she went away.

Was it not hard?

If he cared. Did he care? How passionately Margaret longed to know; but that she never could know now. And so too he must think, for her sake, for Dudley's, that she never cared. Past falsehood must be proved for present truth. What a puzzle it was!

But pride came to her rescue. Probably he did not care, in which case it would be easy for her to be, to make-believe she had always been, indifferent.

But how hard it was! How tired she was of

all this "make-believe." Of late, indeed, it had been easier. She had learnt to smile when she had rather have cried; she had learnt to jest when she would rather have been silent; she had learnt to look gay when she would have liked to die; but, in truth, it was weary work.

And now it would be harder. She must make-believe before Valentin—Valentin, who knew every change of her face, every turn of her mind—Valentin, whom she had never deceived yet; oh! she thought she could not go through with it.

Still, however, he must not know she had ever cared.

For two or three days this frame of mind lasted; and, meanwhile, Dudley was always there, and the acting, or rather rehearsing, went on; and, meanwhile, Valentin came again to call.

Then, too, Dudley asked him to dinner.

It was not much to do for a man who had saved his life, and whose prospective life-companion he had stolen.

However, appearances seemed smooth enough. Valentin and Margaret seemed to converse easily enough. But then appearances are deceitful, and none were aware, not even either of these two,

of the volcano, so ready to burst, smouldering below.

Not yet had Valentin seen Margaret alone. They had had conversations at dinner, in the drawing-room, in society, but that is not talking, and Valentin knew as little of her state of mind towards him as he did on the day when she gave him that hauntingly cold look in the park. Just now she was afraid to be alone with him. She had, moreover, a most irritating habit of saying "Where is Dudley?" whenever Valentin approached.

Probably she did it unconsciously, for when at last he said bitterly—

"Dudley! It is always Dudley. I used to be wanted, but now he is in my place."

Then she turned away with a light laugh, but she never asked anxiously for Dudley again.

CHAPTER XI.

Countess. I thought as much. This comes, you see,
Of sentiment, and Arcady,
Where vows are hung on every tree—
The Baron (offering his arm, with a low bow).
And no one dreams—of Perfidy.
The Ballad à la Mode.

The preparations for Mrs. Hoffman's dramatic entertainment progressed rapidly. Rehearsals seemed to be going on all day, and at every available corner. All was hurry, bustle, confusion, and intense excitement. The "company" were now in the highest spirits at their approaching success, now at the lowest ebb of despair and declaring that failure was inevitably stamped upon their enterprise.

The guests were bidden, and more had accepted than the rooms would hold, yet still Mrs. Hoffman was persecuted with other people's friends wanting invitations. It is always so in London. Then, too, in the winter people will go

to anything, and even if it had not been so theatricals are always amusing.

Moreover, Mrs. Hoffman had indeed succeeded in gathering a circle round her. Her frequent "Evenings at home," the careless freedom of her parties, the amusement always to be found there, added to the cleverness and brilliancy of some of her intimates, had made her house popular, and had given a sort of reflected light to her name, known to those who cultivated literary and artistic people. Her gatherings had become celebrated.

Added to this, Margaret's engagement had made some noise. The wealth of the Vanes had been a frequent topic of conversation since Sir Gilbert's death; people had not known till then how rich the old man was. Now they were anxious to see the girl picked up somewhere on the Rhine, with whom the boy was so madly in love, and whom his mother disliked so much.

Mrs. Vane had been invited to the party; whether she would come was still wrapped in the clouds of futurity. She herself thought that she would not go.

Mrs. Hoffman said she should have another chair to give away if Mrs. Vane did not come;

and the more Dudley saw Margaret rehearse her "Rosalind" the more he hoped she would come, as she must then be won over to her side, he was sure.

It was two days before that fixed for the party; the stage was put up, and Mrs. Hoffman and Margaret were standing on it discussing decorations, lights, and such preparations, when Orford Ellis burst in.

"What do you think has happened? We are done for."

"What do you say?" asked Mrs. Hoffman.

"What is the matter?" asked Margaret, setting down a chandelier she had in her hand.

"Orlando is thrown."

"Don't make jokes, Mr. Ellis," said Margaret. "You know perfectly well he throws Charles."

"I don't mean that. I mean Powys is really thrown from his horse."

"Seriously?"

"Most seriously. Collar-bone broken, they say."

"How stupid he is," said Margaret. "I have always told him not to ride that horse. I knew he would come down."

"He said he could not afford a better."

"That is nonsense. He will have to afford a doctor now. I am sorry for him indeed."

"What are we to do for Orlando?" asked Mrs. Hoffman.

Blank dismay was written on all their faces.

"Could I do it?" suggested Mrs. Hoffman.

The others laughed.

"The wrestling scene *is* cut out," said Margaret.

"I know the words from hearing them so often, and I am sure every one would *like it*."

"My dear mother, you must be mad."

Then Dudley sauntered in.

"I'll do it, Queen Daisy. I am sure I could do it with you to teach me."

Ellis held his breath in an agony. Did Margaret know how stupid this lover of hers was? Would she, blind as she was, let him act, and spoil the entire harmony of their "As you like it"? But he need not have been alarmed. Margaret laughed good-humouredly.

"You, my dear boy! No, thank you. It is not your line. I might as well try to play at cricket as you to act."

"Just let me try. I might do it. It looks easy enough."

"Ask a fish to run, dear; it is nonsense. And you have always hated acting so."

"I had better try to get some one from the theatre."

"What! a professional!" exclaimed Margaret, delighted.

"A real theatrical!" cried Mrs. Hoffman.

"I really think I had."

What a dreadful day it was! One by one all of the "company" dropped in, and the dismay and despair were dreadful. Then came a scribbled note from Bertram Powys, confirming the news and precluding all hope of his being able to act. And Mr. Ellis never came back. Besides all this, there were a hundred other things to be thought of: flowers, scenery, stage-fittings, and through it all Dudley kept saying—

"I don't much see the use of going to all this expense till you have got your man. If you don't get your man you can't have your play. I think you had much better send things round and put everybody off; or send a notice to the paper—that won't cost much."

To these suggestions no one vouchsafed any answer at all, but at last, as they continued, and as a falling drop at last will cave a stone, Mrs.

Hoffman came to Margaret, who was sitting in the little green-room beyond, surrounded by an indescribable chaotic mass of "properties" and of stage paraphernalia, and she said—

"What a bore he is about the expense!"

"Let us pay for it, mother," said Margaret, grandly.

"Can't, dear; have not the money. Oh, well! I suppose rich people are always like this."

"I am afraid it will cost a good deal," said Margaret, thoughtfully.

"Don't teaze yourself. You may at least comfort yourself with the thought that you need never worry yourself about money again as long as you live. I wish I could say as much."

"I don't know, mother. I am rather sorry. I would rather be going on the stage, I think, and be earning money honestly. There is something grand in a woman earning her livelihood by art."

"Nonsense, child! you don't know what you are talking about."

Just then there was a burst of applause in the other room, with much laughter, and Margaret sprang up to discover the cause.

"Here is your man," said Orford Ellis, laughing. "We have just had a rehearsal, and he will certainly bring the house down."

There was no one standing on the stage but Valentin von Broderode.

"Where?" asked Margaret.

"He says I am to do it," said Valentin.

"You!"

She burst out laughing. Then she looked at him apologetically, and from him to Orford Ellis.

"He must be mad," said she to Valentin.

"He is mad," said Dudley, from behind.

"On the contrary," said Ellis, "Von Broderode can do it very well. His English is first-rate, and he has done the part before."

"Have you?" questioned Margaret.

"Yes; at Heidelberg, some years ago."

Margaret turned away. She was annoyed. How was she to sustain that tender fire of soft words from Valentin? how was she herself to disguise all feeling in playing Rosalind? was it not dangerous? She looked helplessly to Orford Ellis, but there was no help there.

"I went everywhere. No man to be got who had a free evening. They simply laughed at me, and consigned me and my Orlando to the limbo of

outer darkness and impotent suffering. On the stairs here I met this man. He is perfect. Try him. Come, fair Rosalind, give us a rehearsal, and show us what you can do."

How distasteful it was to her; she had a thousand reasons against it.

"Rosalind will not act with me, I think," said Valentin, watching her narrowly.

They all looked surprised. Was there anything, any old friendship or any old animosity, between Margaret and the handsome German? Margaret saw the thought written on their faces. She started up at once.

"Of course I will act, if you are all serious, and if Valentin really means it."

"Bravo! bravo!"

"Now we shall have some fun."

"Where is the prompter?"

"Touchstone, where are you?" said Margaret.

Mr. Wemyss was Touchstone.

"I come at your bidding, like another Ariel," said he.

"And where is Celia, Miss Powys?"

"She is sewing curtains together, like another Penelope, as they are to be undone again directly. She is in the dining-room. Tell her, Dudley."

After all it was not so bad. There was so much laughing about it, such jokes, such silly repartees, Rosalind and Orlando had no time for foolish sentiment at all. Afterwards, when together they set to work at their parts gravely, they were not alone, for the prompter was always there. Margaret forgot herself in her part, and Valentin, in his excessive desire to please her, forgot himself too. On the whole, Margaret thought she liked acting with him; it seemed like a renewal of their old friendship, and yet it was so perfectly safe. Some of the words they had to speak did indeed bring them near to a renewal of old thoughts, but there was no time to follow out the thread, for the next moment they were far away on other wings. To Margaret it was a triumph; in the part she showed her strength. As Rosalind, as Ganymede, she laughed, she coquetted, she was a stronger, brighter, and withal a far more tender being than now she could ever have dared to be as Margaret.

Would Shakspere's play heal the sores after all? Would past unkindness be forgot? Would truth, in some moment of excitement, discover herself to the anxious, longing eyes of both? Mrs. Hoffman looked on and trembled.

And Dudley Vane looked on too. How the old words he had heard from both in the village on the Rhine rang in his ears now.

"He is my angel, my ideal," had said Margaret.

"With her rests my happiness," had said Valentin.

Yet now Margaret had given her word to Dudley, and her efforts now were only bent, not for the old tender words Valentin had given her, not for any of the old affection which had proved so false, but to dissipate if she might that bitterness that seemed to be hanging over him, to see again the old playful familiarity that had endeared him so to them all.

As for him, he wanted to find out if she had ever loved him, or if, as Mrs. Hoffman had said, he had only been a tool in their hands.

The great evening had come. The guests were in their places; the "company" were having the last touches of rouge and powder administered, the last glass of champagne had circulated, and the manager's bell rang out.

Up went the curtain, and Rosalind and Celia were discovered on the lawn. What a pretty scene it was. There was a burst of applause. And then the girls began the play.

How well it went. What pathos in Rosalind, till she changes her tune to merriment for Celia's sake. Then Touchstone brought a sharper edge to their talk, and then after the wrestling, which demanded more space than Mrs. Hoffman's drawing-room could provide, Orlando comes.

Has she not rehearsed with him? has she not played and jested with him? Why, now, does her heart quail, and suddenly she fears him so terribly? And then she tries to get away from her fear, to push the thought away from her. If he should see, if now he should understand—but, surely, he cannot; for he does not care; he never cared. So she reasons with herself, and so she awaits him; so, seemingly proud and cold and self-possessed as ever, she meets him, and so with a tenderness, alas! only too true, she plays her part.

> *"I should have given tears unto entreaties,*
> *Ere he should thus have ventur'd,"*

said she.

So, also—letting her soul shine through her eyes, and making Valentin wonder, "Can a woman feign so and be nothing but feigning?" —she gives him her chain.

> *"Gentleman,*
> *Wear this for me, one out of suits with fortune,*
> *That could give more, but that her hand lacks means."*

Why, when, seemingly of her own inclination, Rosalind returns, asking,

"Did you call, sir?"

—why did Valentin's eyes meet hers, and did they seem to say to each other, "We would call and we would come, if we dared"?

Valentin made his exit with the rest, but afterwards all through the next scene, from one of the wings, he watched her with a feverish fascination, wishing for one word, just one word of explanation.

The next Act took them to the sun-lit glades of the forest of Arden. This was a master-piece of talent and ingenuity; which of the company had not had a hand in this wondrous scenery? It took the audience away into dreamland; away into far-off days of golden summer, soft greys and blues, and silvery light beaming over all. It was a true miniature of happy woodland life, and then on this picture of happiness comes man with his lot of adversity and sorrows, but through his sorrows, as the sunshine through the leaves, comes also the sunshine of his hopeful, noble spirit, which chases away the suffering and dissipates the clouds of adversity. If the scenery did not entirely illustrate the moral of the play, surely

the cheerful, manly bearing of Duke Senior did so. The audience became frantic in their applause, and confused in their gratitude, for they hardly knew whether they should pay it to the actors who were interpreting the great master so reverently and tenderly for them, or whether the poet himself should win all their thanks.

Margaret was alone in the green-room, she was waiting to go on; in truth she was weary; the constant effort, the constant strain, this fear of Valentin was too much. She leant her head on her hand, and bowed herself down in utter despair; a moment more, and in the reaction of excitement she would have sobbed.

"As proud, as hard, as cold as marble," said a voice.

It was Valentin. He was standing in front of her, looking at her fixedly.

Margaret started to her feet.

Valentin smiled, and tried to take her hand.

"Do I see clear at last? We are both behind the curtain, are we not?"

"You see nothing. I am tired; that is all."

"Dudley is not here."

"Dudley is—before the curtain."

"A truce to this," said he, impatiently; "shall we not speak plainly to each other?"

But the Act was over. The actors, emancipated from wings, side-scenes, and right and left exits, came trooping back in wild glee into the green-room. Orford Ellis had won his honours as Melancholy Jaques, and in another moment Margaret was on the stage reading the verses Orlando had written her.

Why, a few moments later, when she and Celia were in hiding behind the tree, and Jaques says—

"We two will rail against our mistress the world, and all our misery"

—why did Orlando look so pointedly at Margaret as he answered—

"I will chide no breather in the world but myself, against whom I know most faults"?

Why did Margaret start at his look? and how was it that she forgot herself so far as to smile when Jaques says—

"The worst fault you have is to be in love"?

No; Margaret should not have smiled. Orlando's answer was well-known to her—

"'Tis a fault I will not change for your best virtue."

"Why, Margaret! how you tremble," said Miss Powys to her.

"Let us see, what is my cue? Oh, Master Melancholy, and 'I will speak to him as a saucy lackey.' Come, Celia."

What a scene it was.

Dudley and Mrs. Hoffman looked on with ever-increasing interest. Mrs. Hoffman knew that it was tragedy under the name of comedy that was being acted before her; but even she was not alive to the full meaning of the scene. How quick was the repartee; and what weight had each word in the ears of the speakers. At rehearsal it had been different. Then there had been laughing and talking around them; but now everything was hushed, every eye was fixed on them, and every one seemed to share in the excitement of the moment, and more or less to comprehend the bitter import of the words.

The light words in Rosalind's mouth flew like poisoned shafts to Valentin's heart; his answers, couched so solemnly, came to her as though they cried out on her falsehood, and oppressed her cruelly with their sternness. Neither had ever acted so earnestly before, but neither had played their life's play in public before. The light veil

thrown before the eyes of the audience made the danger keener. It was pathetic; it was cruel.

"*Orl. Can you remember any of the principal evils that he laid to the charge of women?*"

And he looked as though they both shared a secret in the subject. And when Rosalind said—

"*He taught me how to know a man in love; . . . I am sure you are not a prisoner,*"

she looked scorn itself. Was there ever such falsehood as Valentin's?

"*Fair youth,*" says Orlando, "*I would I could make thee believe I love.*"

"*Me believe it! you may as soon make her that you love believe it.*"

And then she says, with a ring of true contempt in her voice—for Margaret thinks she has learnt to despise it,—

"*Love is merely a madness.*"

And so he offers to cure it.

"*I would not be cured, youth.*"

Had he not tried it all the winter in Berlin; and had he not found the cure impossible, and the attempt unpleasant?

And then comes the tender end to their wordy war, when she tells him to woo her that she may

cure him, and to call her Rosalind; and Margaret goes away into the darkness beyond the green-room, and sobs her heart out, for she thinks she has found that he loves her.

There, sobbing, he found her.

"It is time; I came to tell you. What——"

He stopped, confused, a wild joy throbbing at his heart.

"Let me come," said she, wearily.

She glided past him.

So through the next scene. A miserable feeling of guilt weighing down her heart, and lurking through her eyes; a wild sense of truth discovered at last exciting him and threatening to drive "Orlando" out of his head. Angry with herself, bitter, dejected,—frightened, as she found how little reliance she could place in herself,—she carried the bitterness of defeat into the play.

"You a lover!"

and her lip curled as she said it.

"My fair Rosalind, I come within an hour of my promise."

But she swears he is heart-whole; and then, such was the fiendish contrivance of fate, she had to be tender once more—tender, when he had

seen her tears, had heard her sobs; oh! was it not hard? Moreover, it was not true, she said to herself; she loved Dudley now, because she had sworn to.

All through the playful, tender words they went.

"*Come, woo me, woo me.*"

And he—

"*Then love me, Rosalind.*"

And then she in her fit of childish humour—

"*Come, sister, you shall be the priest, and marry us.*"

Could they really go through with the travesty? Yes; was not Dudley looking on?

So, to the last, where Rosalind has to summon all her coquetry, all her tenderness, all her ingenuity in one, and make fate subservient to everyone's desires; where, promising every one happiness, Valentin says with a bitterness that needed no acting—

"*But oh, how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes.*"

Margaret turned away guiltily, right up to the marriage at the end, where, as Valentin said, every one was made happy but himself.

"What do you mean?" asked Margaret.

"Why, they may all marry in sober earnest if they like, for all I know. But my Rosalind is engaged to be another man's wife."

"Yes," said she, with her eyes cast down.

They were alone then, standing in a dark corner of the stage, behind the screens.

"Is it so? Must all my wooing go for nothing then?"

"It was in the play. We were only acting, you know."

Valentin thought her voice trembled.

"Only acting!"

"Valentin, you are dreaming; you have gone back to the old days at Sonnenthal. You must not talk to me any more like this now."

She raised her head with sudden dignity.

"Only acting! only dreaming! Was that only a dream at Sonnenthal?"

"Yes; only a dream."

She passed him as she said it, and he, left alone, prepared to follow the others who were on their way down-stairs.

CHAPTER XII.

The tender grace of a day that is dead
Shall never come back to me.

Mrs. Vane had come to the theatricals, and with her had also come a stiff and starched sister of hers, a Miss Wygram, and a brother, whom we have heard casually mentioned as "Uncle Ted."

These three persons had arrived rather early, and disregarding Mrs. Hoffman's pressing invitation that they should occupy seats in the front row, had installed themselves with mock humility in the fourth.

"May gentlemen have seats?" had asked "Uncle Teddy."

"Oh, certainly," answered Mrs. Hoffman. "I hope so."

Thereupon they all sat down, and Uncle Teddy having brought in his stick, leaned forward on it, and proceeded to the deliberate contemplation of

his new boots, looking up only now and again with an air of severe protestation against the proceedings.

Dudley had meant Mrs. Vane to come in order that she might be vanquished by Margaret's beauty and talent. Mrs. Vane had come in order that she might find unanswerable charges for future use against Margaret to Dudley.

On Margaret's first appearance on the stage, Mrs. Vane, and Miss Wygram, and Uncle Teddy had exchanged glances. Uncle Teddy had, in fact, only looked to his female leaders for his cue, but seeing indignant astonishment expressed by them, he endeavoured to express it also, till Rosalind won him fairly, and admiration reigned on his countenance, notwithstanding all his efforts.

Later, however, when Margaret was transformed into Ganymede, the scandalized virtue of the two spectators knew no bounds; it was a wonder they kept their seats. They shook their heads, they blushed, they whispered, they buried their faces in their handkerchiefs, and were angry with Uncle Ted for his stolid immovability.

"Shocking! isn't it, Ted?" said Mrs. Vane, leaning over across Miss Wygram.

"Very pretty," said he.

"Pr—r—retty!" ejaculated both voices at once.

"Very well done, I think," said he.

"The acting; yes. But the dress——"

"I meant the dress."

"What? you——"

"Cloak quite long, and as for that skirt, or what do you call it, how could you have more?"

"To think of that woman being Dudley's wife."

"Good foot; and look at her hand; Ganymede never had such a hand as that, I'll be bound."

Afterwards, when the supper was going on, and Mrs. Vane was bent on speedy departure, for, as she said to Miss Wygram, she "could keep her feelings to herself no longer," Mr. Tudor came up to her. He was in fact beaming with animation, and knowing little of Mrs. Vane, was under the impression that she must have been vanquished by what she had seen. But woman's hate requires a more potent spell to dissipate it.

"Beautiful! wasn't it? I never saw such a success."

"I came prepared for a good deal, but hardly for such——"

"Exactly; quite unprecedented. I cannot think where she gets it from. If she were only on the stage, why all London would rave about her."

"I wish she would go."

"Eh? hardly that, I suppose. Or at least Dudley would not like it. You are carried away by your feelings, Mrs. Vane."

"Feelings! yes, indeed. To think I should have lived to see this—Dudley's future bride in man's clothes on the stage."

Mr. Tudor's lower jaw dropped.

"Ah! yes—well—but you know the play hinges on that; the text must be adhered to. Though I quite agree with you——"

"It is too dreadful."

"Though it was gracefully managed; didn't you think so, Mr. Wygram?"

"Most gracefully."

"And really—well, really I did not think of it very much. But still, of course——"

"And then how forward she is. Who was the man she made love to?"

"A German. But you know that is the play, not Miss Hoffman."

"Not Miss Hoffman! Well, I think it was

Miss Hoffman, and I think she had better marry him—much better, and I shall tell Dudley so. They can go the round of the theatres quite comfortably together, and may make, I dare say, a great deal of money by their engagements."

Mr. Tudor smiled, but he did not answer.

"History repeats itself," thought he to himself.

Next day at the hotel, when Dudley came to see his mother, it was no better.

"I am sorry I went, Duddy, very sorry."

"Why?"

"For your sake I am sorry. I had made up my mind to like her, to do my very best, but now——"

"Do you mean to say you did not like the play?"

"Like it?" she looked at her son, sorrowfully amazed. "How could I like it?"

"They all say there never was such a success; that Margaret never played like that before, and that if she chose now—you should just see the cards and notes and compliments they have had to-day."

"That is false London, I suppose," and she sighed. "No lady could really like it. It was shocking, it was dreadful——"

"What was shocking, I should like to know?"

"The dress, Duddy; her dress."

"The dress! why, that is a trifle, and if it were not, they say it was beautifully managed."

"Ah! the blind boy; the little blind boy. And then *they*, Duddy; who are they?"

"All the people there, and the men especially. And lots of them are great at that, write plays, and go in for that sort of thing, and know all about it."

"I thought them a very odd set altogether. Once or twice when I spoke to Mary Wygram, and when I really was shocked, they burst out laughing. Two young men who were standing near us were particularly rude."

"Yes; but then, my dear mother, you made a fool of yourself. Those sort of people never will stand that."

"I shall always say what I think, wherever I may be; you may be quite sure of that. But the long and short of it is, that Shakspere is not meant for the family or the drawing-room. He is too coarse, and for my part I feel insulted by having been invited to see such an exhibition."

"They all swear by Shakspere; you should just hear them. I don't know much about him

myself, but I really must read him up. Margaret says when we are married she will read me a play sometimes in the evening."

"If Margaret, my dear Dudley, were to marry that graceful hero who acted with her, and who evidently does understand Shakspere so well, she would I am sure be much better suited than if she undertook the task of explaining the poetry to you."

Dudley rose from his chair terribly excited, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, faced his mother.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing."

"Why did you say it? Did you notice anything?"

His mother stopped to think. Might it be worth her while to hint at all sorts of dreadful things?

"Did you?" he asked again, turning angrily to Mary Wygram, who was sitting trembling too much to go on with her work.

"Oh no, nothing at all; nothing, I assure you. There was nothing."

He looked scornfully at his mother.

"They seemed interested in each other."

"Psha! they are old friends. She knew him before she knew me. That is the man, mother, who saved my life. You had better say nothing against him; that is why Margaret likes him."

A half-truth and a half-falsehood. He had said it excitedly. Then he stopped to think. Thinking afterwards, he found it must be true.

Meanwhile, if he could have transported himself suddenly to Hans Place, if he could have rendered himself invisible, would he have been so sure of the truth of it?

Mrs. Hoffman was out, she had "gone shopping," and Margaret was sitting alone on the stage, which had not yet been taken away.

It was about twelve o'clock, when suddenly there came a ring at the bell, and Gretchen announced Count von Broderode.

He laughed when he saw her sitting up there.

"What are you doing?" asked he. "No; don't come down."

He came up and sat down beside her.

"Shall I tell you?"

"You are thinking over your triumphs of last night."

"On the contrary, I am thirsting for more triumphs, for I am waiting for the dressmaker."

"Ah! I suppose so. The trousseau."

"Exactly."

"I am so glad to find you alone."

Then she got up.

"Will you wait a moment? I wish to speak to you."

She sat down and waited, watching him.

He got up restlessly and walked up and down the stage in front of her.

"Do you want the prompter?" asked she, playfully.

He came close to her.

"I want you to explain to me; will you?"

"There is nothing to explain."

"Why did you change so suddenly? Why—why——"

His manner told her all. There had been some mistake. He cared after all. The revulsion of feeling was intense; it was a pang of joy almost too sharp to withstand.

"I thought you and I were——"

"Hush! I must not hear this. You forget—now it is too late."

"Surely not; not if you are true, as you used to let me think you were; not if you ever cared——"

How she longed to tell him all. How she longed to throw herself at his feet, and tell him she always cared. But there was a spectre rising before her; Dudley's face haunted her. No, she had done enough evil, she thought. She must keep her word now. She had given it; it was irrevocable. What were these pleading eyes, these tender words, this well-known voice to her now?

"It is no good explaining," she stammered. "It is too late. You were false. Dudley was true. I took Dudley."

In her haste she stumbled upon the injustice.

"I—false? I? What are you saying? Do you remember those days, those dreams we had together? Do you remember how you first showed me the pride and joy of life, how you first taught me the worth of love and all the bliss its truth gives? Did you find me a slow pupil? And did we not learn together? Did not the world open its treasures for us both at once, and did not Nature smile upon us first together? Did we not catch gleams of happiness when standing side by side, which we had never seen before? And did not long vistas of joy come to me when your eyes looked into mine,

and told me sweet truths undreamed of before? Was it not you who showed me ambition, and who gave me earnest aims in life? Was it not the hope of your sympathy, your spirit which gave me strength to attempt to pursue them? Nay, Margaret, my dreams, my hopes, my aims, my ambition, were they not centred in you? Did I not love you? And I—I thought you loved me too."

"Why did you throw it all away?"

"I throw it away? You would not see me; you refused me; you would not even say 'Good-bye.'"

"On the contrary, Valentin; now you are false. Ah! stop your fine language and your tender reproofs. They are all false. I have been teaching myself to disbelieve all hope, all happiness, all kind words ever since. It was too hard. You should not have made me believe —— What am I saying? At least—I mean, Valentin, we dreamed too well; we amused ourselves with our dream too much. That was false. That was not, could not be, life. Life is so different, so dull, so practical, so real, so different from that. However, Count von Broderode, I wrote to you, and asked you to come to see me."

She smiled triumphantly, as though now she had proved his falsehood.

"You wrote? I never got the letter."

"Oh, *mon ami!* Gretchen took it."

"Where to?"

"To Sonnenfels."

"When?"

"It was your last evening, I think. You were there. I saw the lights from the castle at Blumenthal. She and Fritz took it together. She said you and Frau Senden were singing."

"I tell you, Queen Daisy, I never got the letter. Ah! now I remember."

He strode across the stage excitedly.

"Margaret, now I see. I saw Fritz, I ran out, I hoped, I knew not what, that you might be there, that you might be near. I came back; Lotta had burnt something; it was your note."

"Oh, Valentin!"

A world of sorrow in the words.

Her head was bent down; and he, too, he felt as though he could not face her.

"And I doubted you, Margaret—I doubted you."

What a silence it was.

Meanwhile, they learnt the past.

"Was that destiny? Margaret, they often say that destiny is cruel, implacable. Say, was that destiny?"

"I do not know."

She rose from her seat, and went towards a little cabinet that stood against the wall. There, leaning her arms on it, she buried her face away from him.

"And I was so angry with you," he went on. "I went away to Berlin, vowing I would forget you, and all through the weary autumn I tried. But I could not. So then I came to England to find you; and now—say, Margaret, now I have found you?"

She did not move or speak.

"And you doubted me too?"

"Yes."

"But now, Margaret; now—it is not too late surely——"

"It is too late."

She turned round and faced him sternly as she said it.

"You do not love him?"

Not facing him; she could not say it so.

"Yes; I love him."

"And you do not care for me?"

"No; I do not care for you."

"Turn round and say it. I don't believe it so."

"One would think we were acting," said she, lightly. Her voice shook as she said it.

"Say it again," said he, passionately.

"I love him, and I do not care for you."

"There is falsehood somewhere in that," said he. "Heaven forgive you."

They looked at each other for a moment in silence, a terrible silence, when no smile, no shadow of relenting was visible on either face.

A tear rolled down her cheek.

"Margaret, dear Margaret," said he, vehemently, "think well what you are doing. Think of the misery you consign me to, think of yourself, and think of Dudley too."

"I will tell you the truth, Valentin," said she. "You will never breathe it again to any one? You will never use it against my will—not even for my good?"

"Trust me completely."

Then she moved a few paces back from him.

"Valentin, I did care for you; it is nonsense to say I did not."

He came nearer. She put up her hand.

"But that is over now."

He fell back again.

"When you did not come, or write, or make any sign all through the long weeks, then I vowed I would forget you. Just then Dudley came. He was so kind, so true, so open; there was nothing false about him. He was so honest. Then—then—then we were very poor; mother had been extravagant; we were in great want of money; there were pressing difficulties; Dudley found it out; and then he offered her to pay it off if I would marry him. She accepted the money, and left me to accept him——"

"And so you tell me you love him?"

"And so, out of gratitude, I love him."

"You are—sold, in fact?"

She did not answer.

"And you are content with your purchaser?"

She looked at him piteously.

"How long will you love him, do you think? And will you honour him, and will you obey him? Is it right, do you think? It is all false, you know. You did not really love him when you accepted him?"

"He is content."

"And that is woman!"

Valentin looked disgusted.

"We used to think him stupid, you and I; do you think him stupid now?"

"Yes; he is stupid. But I like stupid people better than clever ones."

"He had a bad expression, we used to say, you and I."

"That will improve."

"He cannot act, or play, or sing; he can just read. He will be a desirable companion."

"He will not want much of me."

"He is rich."

"That covers a multitude of sins."

"And you are charitable?"

"More than you are."

"You are determined?"

"I am."

"You think you are right?"

"I know it."

"You do not see that you are false, and hypocritical, and mercenary, and that in fact you marry an idiot for his money."

"I marry to save my mother from disgrace."

"And what becomes of Dudley in this?"

"He is content."

"And what becomes of me?"

She looked at him, as if——well! but she

would have given worlds if she might have comforted, have soothed him. He should not have tempted her so. A moment after she held out to him the mask which she had learnt to use so cleverly herself.

"You do not care."

"By Heaven, I will tell no such lies as you delight in. I do care. You shall never say you did it with your eyes shut, or that you did not know I cared."

"I had better not know it."

"You cannot help yourself."

Then she turned to him, like a poor animal at bay.

"Valentin, you are not kind. You do not even pity me."

He looked at her puzzled.

"How am I to pity you, when it is your own doing?"

"It is not, or, at least, it was not. Now I have been driven too far to retract. I must go on. You see I must. You ought to help me to be firm."

"Help you! to do wrong?"

"Oh, it isn't wrong. Don't you see it isn't? Don't you see that I must do it? It is my fate.

One has heard before of girls marrying to save their families from disgrace, and they have lived, and have learnt to love their husbands and to be happy, and so shall I. Good-bye, Valentin."

She put out her hand to him. Was he never going to take it?

"No; I cannot take it, Margaret. You are too false. You will see it some day, and will acknowledge I am right."

He did not even look at her again; he took up his hat and he went away.

CHAPTER XIII.

Can I think of her as dead, and love her for the love she bore?
No—she never loved me truly: love is love for evermore.
Locksley Hall.

THE wedding-day drew near, and presents and dresses seemed to fill the minds of most of those concerned. Mrs. Hoffman said she did not know what it was to sit quiet for a moment, while, on the contrary, the calm seemed to deepen in Margaret's character, and she looked on with an amused smile at all that was going on around her.

After the conversation recorded in the last chapter, Valentin and Margaret had tacitly avoided each other; not that he did not come to Hans Place, for he was there daily (it seemed as if he came against his will, and as though he could not keep away), but they avoided being alone together. Margaret could have no wish to see him now, and he felt too bitter towards

her to trust himself with her when no one could overhear his taunts. He was beginning to learn that her mind was made up unchangeably, and that recrimination was useless; but it was difficult for him to take the lesson quietly. He was but learning now what she had learnt in the early winter; the same dull, painful ideas were drilling themselves into his head which had throbbed through her in the first long days of her arrival in England. She watched him with pain, for she read his thoughts and knew she was to blame; she knew it all beforehand. Thus and thus did he think: Women were false; there was not one true on the earth, none worth trusting, or worthy of any sacrifice. A selfish life was all a sensible man could live; any faith in others must lead to disappointment.

How she pitied him! How she longed for nobler hopes, nobler faith to come to him. How she hated herself for having been the one to destroy his enthusiasm, his confidence, and his aspirations. His very nature seemed changed; now she hardly knew him for the bright ideal she had worshipped the autumn before at Sonnenthal; yet again, suddenly a gleam of the old spirit would flash out, and dimly, like a ghost

of her old friend, she would feel Valentin was near.

Yet she could not help him; she could but stand at a distance and watch. Her kindness would have been rejected with scorn; her kindness might have been considered dishonourable. Her hands were tied, and she could but look on, take his bitterness in all meekness, and wait.

And meanwhile this separation between these two friends filled the other on-lookers with delight.

Mrs. Hoffman marked her sense of approval thus—

"Margaret, my dear, I am glad you do not talk too much to Valentin; I was afraid that after acting together——"

"Why, mother! What are you afraid of? We are old friends, nothing more."

Something in her daughter's manner precluded her asking questions.

"Nothing more! But still, being so intimate, I was afraid that Dudley might get a little jealous."

"You need never be afraid of anything of that sort."

Mrs. Hoffman, knowing what she knew, thought it a little unfair, and she felt angry.

"Oh, you are going to be Cæsar's wife, of course! But what coloured bonnet do you have to go away in?"

"Grey, and a crimson flower, mother."

After that no further word was spoken about Valentin, but Mrs. Hoffman kept her eyes open; then came to the conclusion that he was very sharp, sarcastic, and disagreeable, that he never could have cared for Margaret, but that he had notwithstanding first-rate taste in jewellery, also in furniture, and as she was rather in want of a man to go about with her, Dudley and Margaret being so taken up with each other, she took him with her everywhere, partly for her own use, and partly that he might be out of Margaret's way. Dudley had told Margaret that she was to have the furnishing of her boudoir left entirely to her own taste, and Mrs. Hoffman having made an expedition to Froghambury during Mrs. Vane's absence, from which she returned radiant, was now full of all sorts of artistic notions on the subject, in which Valentin amused himself by helping. What journeys they had to Wardour Street and to all kinds of places; what discus-

sions and arguments there were, and always Mrs. Hoffman was beaten, and Valentin had his way; "for," as she said continually, "his taste and imagination, and his knowledge, my dear, surpass anything I ever came across in so young a man. He knows the period of everything, and the style of every period."

So it ended by Margaret's boudoir being furnished by Valentin. And while all this fuss and excitement were going on about the wedding, while dresses and costumes seemed to occupy the female part of the society, Dudley, who found Margaret too busy sometimes to be always with him, was drawn again unconsciously to Valentin. It seemed as if it must have been a bad dream that he had ever cared for her; it must all have been a mistake; why, now they never so much as spoke to each other. Was it perhaps that the power of his love had drawn Margaret so closely to him? Just because he cared so much, had she forgotten Valentin? or would it have been so always, if he only had been able to make her understand? Would she always have preferred him, if she only had known him best? Thinking so, he beamed with happiness, and his joy, running over, made him love Margaret more, and all

the world also. Valentin again found himself gradually regaining his old place in Dudley's heart; once more he was the trusted friend; once more he was the confidant of his jests and his hopes and his difficulties; once more he found himself being esteemed and honoured as he had been before jealousy had poisoned Dudley's mind against him.

"You must come and stay with us at Froghambury, old fellow; you must let England be your second home."

Margaret looked on amazed.

"*She* looks astonished. Look at her. Well, he saved my life. Should I not devote it all to him in return?"

"No, certainly not," said she, laughing. "You are going to devote it to me."

"Will you not spare me a little of it?" asked Valentin, watching her narrowly.

"No, certainly not. No more at least than some tiny little bit Dudley may perhaps find over, against my will."

So seemingly life was settling into smooth waters, and the sunlight smiled on the dancing wavelets. Who knew of the swelling current beneath in Valentin's heart, who but Margaret,

and was she not now wholly occupied with Dudley? If she thought of him, as sometimes a bitter word made her think, had she not good hope that the storm would be stilled in time?

Valentin must learn his lesson, must know that he had let his chance slip by, must forget the past, or remember it only, as she did, as a pedestal on which to rear future strength, future self-abnegation, a life of self-denial.

Surely in the intimate friendship and the thorough confidence to which he was now admitted, in all his talk about Buhl cabinets and carved panels with Mrs. Hoffman, in his quick appreciation of humour, in the accounts Dudley gave him of his difficulties, there could not be much room left for disappointed passion! Certainly Dudley had difficulties.

Mrs. Vane made opposition to the marriage, to the settlements, to the day, to the church, to the bridesmaids, to the clergyman, to the breakfast, to the best man—to everything.

Lilly Vane, his sister,—a tall, gawky girl, who had never had a proposal in her life,—said all sorts of bitter, unanswerable things—even insulted Mrs. Hoffman and Margaret to their faces one day during a morning call; while "Uncle Ted"

confined himself to shaking his head and looking unutterable things.

Mr. Tudor temporized, agreeing with Mrs. Vane in Brook Street or at Froghambury, with Mrs. Hoffman in Hans Place, and with Dudley wherever he met him. He was therefore no use at all to anybody, but made much mischief, and thought he was successfully feathering his own nest.

When it came to Mrs. Vane at last, that she must accept the inevitable, and that nothing could prevent the marriage, she took some old lace off an old gown and sent it to Margaret. No other Vane sent any present at all.

"What does it matter?" said Margaret. "Who would care for presents given one by people who do not love one? A present is only a sign of affection; if it isn't that it is nothing."

Valentin gave his present to Dudley. Between himself and Margaret there was no "sign of affection" at all.

Margaret liked it best so.

"When feeling is dead," she said to herself, "it is painful to assume it. After all, I only want Dudley and he to be friends; that is all I can want; that was my first idea when I first

saw them together. How oddly things have turned out!"

"What will you do with your evenings at Froghambury?" said Valentin to her a day or two before the wedding.

"I do not know. I am not there yet. We are going to Scotland for a month."

"Will you have music? Oh, but Dudley does not care for it."

"I shall see what the others do."

"There will be no acting then—no dancing."

"I can always read."

"But if one has no one to talk over one's books with, even that——"

"I do not know, Valentin, what I shall do; but Dudley will tell you afterwards what I do."

"Are you afraid of it?"

This he said with a lowered voice, and his eyes fixed fast upon her face.

"I have an idea," said she. "No; I am not afraid; for though a country life is the life I always dreaded, though I shall have but little sympathy and few friends to help me, yet I am not afraid. I see plenty to do before me; and—I am going to make Dudley a great man—it will

be glorious moulding him to my highest and best ideas. He loves me, so I shall do it."

"Certainly; you will have your hands full."

"And if I succeed, Valentin, by and by, will you not—will you not say I have done well?"

"Yes."

He was touched by her confident energy.

"To make a good, useful man out of him who has wasted all his opportunities hitherto—I will do it; and teaching, I shall learn."

"Be careful, Margaret. Do not be too confident. Do not mistake his nature; think well what it is. Do you know how he will hold you—how when the first fever of his love is over——"

"No, no; then he shall find something better in its place."

"Men are not moulded so easily; and to do good work, we should be true workmen to begin it with."

But Margaret had her idea, and she hugged it to her heart.

Valentin must be left behind; all idle obstacles, all selfishness must be foregone; for the sake of the love she had sworn to Dudley she would sacrifice herself utterly, wholly; for the sake of

making this man true, and great, and worthy of his responsibilities she would sink herself entirely. She had got a dim perception that if she could only divest herself of all selfishness, of all pride, of all caprice, forget herself wholly, forgive faults, live truth and sow it, that then it might be done.

"You cannot do it," said Valentin, tauntingly; "you do not know him as I know him. And you are so weak. Your pride will come in against you everywhere."

"Yet I feel as if I ought to do it, as if the work had been put into my hand to do, as if the power and the influence had been given me. Every one seems to say something bearing upon it; heedless words burn into my soul, and sometimes I seem to stand here — choosing. Why cannot I do it, Valentin?"

"You are too good for him," said he, wonderingly.

"Is not life self-sacrifice? Whose am I? mine or God's? Whose work am I to do? If I could only forget myself better—if I only had more strength. To-day he said to me, 'You may make me what you like.' Surely I shall succeed. You will see some day."

How could he be bitter to her after that?

But he was all the more so, perhaps, that he saw the worth of the woman he had lost.

The wedding-day came at last. A bright, blustering day in March. It was all to be as quiet as possible, for the Vanes were not coming.

Dudley had had many refusals. He had asked Valentin to be best man.

"I could not possibly; I could not possibly think of such a thing."

So he found another young friend of his, who had not long been out of his teens.

Then he had asked Mr. Tudor to marry them, and Mr. Tudor had drawn a long face of disquietude.

"You see, your mother, my dear Dudley——"

"Enough! I would not inconvenience you for worlds."

So the parish priest had to perform the ceremony.

But, notwithstanding these vexations, things went smoothly enough.

Margaret had never looked so beautiful.

"She goes as a dumb animal to the sacrifice," thought Valentin.

The four bridesmaids were bright and cheery as spring itself. The church was full of smartly-

dressed people; moreover, had not Lilly Vane come with a friend? did she not look despair itself? Was not that Mrs. Vane hiding behind a distant pillar? and was not thin Mary Wygram craning over the gallery? Was not this triumph itself? Mrs. Hoffman's new silk dress seemed to gain stiffness at the discovery.

And after the church, was there ever such a merry breakfast?

How kind and bright and beaming they all were. Orford Ellis, and poor Bertram Powys, and Mr. Wemyss, they were all there, and many more of the old sparkling set besides; and what jokes they made; through them the feast was a picture indeed of fat Laughter holding both his sides.

"By Jove, what jolly fellows they are," said Dudley, as repartee answering repartee shot around him.

Speeches were not allowed, they said, but they did nothing but make speeches, only not one was satisfactorily concluded.

Dudley and Margaret cut the cake, and then Dudley tried to make a speech. He did invite them all to Froghambury; but after that the Muse forsook him; and then, actually, Margaret,

blushing and with all her honours upon her, jumped up and thanked them for all their kindness, their presence, and their presents, and for their favours past and to come; "for," she added, "you see I am insatiable; you have not half done with me, and I shall require your friendship always in the future to make me happy—even though Dudley will always be here at my right hand too. Am I not insatiable? Why, you have let me finish my speech!"

They all declared it was an abrupt and not a proper ending; but they cheered her till the applause was deafening; and then the eager strife of tongues began again.

There was only one Knight Doleful there.

Valentin sat playing with his knife and fork, looking nervously now at Dudley, now at Margaret.

She was astonished at his want of control, and she twitted him upon his sad face.

"It is because I must leave you all. I go back to Berlin to-night. My leave is up."

But no sad sentiment could have place there to-day; it was but an excuse for more drinking of healths, for more compliments, for more unfinished speeches.

Even Valentin was obliged to laugh.

At the end, when Margaret sat in the carriage with Dudley, and she looked out on the group gathered on the steps, amid the showers of rice and old shoes with which they were being pelted, the triumphant demeanour of Mrs. Hoffman, the jocund affability of Mr. Tudor, and the downcast, haunting look of Valentin, struck her forcibly, and were impressed on her mind in their vivid contrasts for many a long day.

CHAPTER XIV.

Our life is turned
Out of her course, whenever man is made
An offering or a sacrifice, a tool
Or implement, a passive thing employed
As a brute mean, without acknowledgment
Of common right or interest in the end;
Used or abused, as selfishness may prompt.

Mrs. Hemans.

FROGHAMBURY HOUSE is built at the top of a hill; the road to it goes winding up through the park, under noble old trees, and you catch glimpses of distant vistas, and of the deer standing in the bracken or grazing in the glades, making you dream of all sorts of rural delights. But as for the hill itself, Margaret thought they would never reach the top.

The honeymoon was over—that month of doubtful bliss, and this was the return home.

The horses were going as fast as they could, the post-boy had cracked his whip till he was tired; shouting children and applauding villagers were accompanying the carriage, and triumphal

arches were erected at every possible place, saying, if the tongues of the populace should not say it clearly enough, "Welcome home," "Long life and happiness to you both," and other devices equally well-meaning and equally trite.

"Ah, but she's a bonnie lady," said one of the villagers to his comrade, as they came so close to the carriage that Margaret heard them.

She blushed, and she could not repress a smile as she met their honest gaze.

"Yes, yes; no nonsense about her."

"This will be the beginning of a happy time for us, I know."

"And for her too, I hope."

Another turn in the road.

"Oh, Dudley, what a long hill!"

"It is rather. What do you think of the park?"

"Beautiful!" said she, as she looked over it with strange, unaccustomed eyes.

In Germany houses and parks are not to be found like that; and when Mrs. Hoffman had come down on that journey of exploration, Margaret had not come. "She had rather wait," she said, "till she came to stay." Was she afraid

that she might wish to run away from it? Did she dread the inevitable?

"How bright it all is," said she, softly.

The children's bright faces, as they ran alongside, the laughter, the merry words she heard, pleased her impressionable temperament. She leaned back in the carriage and began to enjoy her home-coming.

"Home!" she muttered in a whisper. "How much there is in the word!"

Just then the great house loomed in sight.

"What will it hold for us both, I wonder, Dudley?"

She glided her hand into her husband's as she spoke.

"I wish those confounded children would hold their tongues, and would go back," said he, roughly.

She looked pained. He was dispelling the illusion. Yet it was nothing new. In this short month many of Margaret's illusions had been dispelled. The truth she had most surely learnt was, that the limit to Dudley's capabilities, and to his temper, was an exceedingly narrow one. She had used to think that man's nature was infinite; now she did not think it was.

"Let them stay," said she. "We do not come home every day."

And now a few moments more, and they are at home.

There stands the great house, proud and solitary in its grandeur, save for the grand old cedars that seem to stretch out their arms protectingly towards it, save too for the noble undulating park and "the cattle on a thousand hills," over which it seems to reign.

Margaret stayed a moment to look and admire, turned a last friendly glance on the group of enthusiastic country-people and servants standing there, and then giving her hand to Dudley, alighted from the carriage, and walking up the broad stone steps, went into her home.

There, inside the great hall, with its armour and heads of deer and its great, stiff, old-fashioned furniture, stood the family waiting to receive her.

Margaret's heart sank.

In the excitement and happiness of the moment she had forgotten them. At one time she had half hoped that they would not be here just at first, but she had made no request, and now here they were, and it was like entering

into a vault and having a row of ghosts to receive her. There seemed to be no flesh and blood there.

First there was Mrs. Vane, stiff and straight; she advanced a step or two with one outstretched hand.

"How do you do, Lady Vane? I am afraid you are tired after your journey? Your rooms are quite ready."

"Oh no, I am not tired; but I am very glad to be here. Ah! there is Lilly."

"How do you do, my new sister?"

Lilly came forward awkwardly as she said it, and kissed Margaret coldly on the forehead. Lilly was too much afraid of Dudley not to be civil.

After that the inevitable Uncle Ted seemed to stumble upon her, as if he were very much surprised at the adventure.

"Mary is in her room, I think. We did not expect you quite so soon; that must be her apology."

"And who is Mary?" asked Margaret.

"My sister," said Mrs. Vane, with acerbity.

"Ah! is she here?"

Meanwhile Dudley was on thorns. Was his

wife to have no warmer reception than this? and if not, how would she bear it?

"Would you like to see your rooms, Lady Vane?"

Margaret laughed aloud.

"Really, Mrs. Vane, I can't help laughing; but you must not call me that."

"Not what?"

Mrs. Vane seemed to tower over her in her indignant surprise.

"Lady Vane; it is too formidable. Couldn't I be Margaret at once, I wonder?"

Then she met Lilly's eye, and she looked on to Uncle Ted's face.

"You might both call me Margaret, couldn't you?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Yes; I should think so."

"Very well, Margaret," said Mrs. Vane.

But the name sounded horrible in Mrs. Vane's lips.

"Will you like to see your rooms, Margaret?"

"If you please. But, ah! am I to run the gauntlet between all those people?" she asked good-humouredly, for she suddenly saw that the inner hall was lined with servants.

"They will not bite," said Mrs. Vane, with a tinge of sarcasm in her voice.

"Then will you lead the way?"

Somehow Margaret always seemed to get the best of it.

There was a rustle of expectation among the servants as she approached, and then a stout, beaming old woman stepped forward.

"And are you Master Dudley's wife? Good luck to you and happiness I am sure. I have known him ever since he was a baby in arms."

"And you are the housekeeper, I am sure?"

"Yes; and there is his nurse; and here is Mr. Douglas, who was with Sir Gilbert, I don't know how long."

"I hope you will all approve of me, I am sure," said Margaret, laughing.

"No fear of that."

"A bright lady, and no mistake."

And then she ran upstairs after Mrs. Vane.

It was like being in contact with an icicle to be alone with that lady.

"This is your sitting-room; your mother furnished it."

This then was Valentin's work. How lovely it was. Every detail had been perfectly and

consistently carried out. How it flattered the eye after the bareness and cold stiffness in the rest of the house. A haven of refuge indeed. But Margaret was too clever to show her satisfaction very vividly.

"What a glorious view!" said she, walking to the window.

"It is pretty, especially on a spring evening like this."

Then there was the bed-room after that, and the dressing-rooms beyond, bare and cold and heavily furnished.

Mrs. Vane glided away.

Margaret came back and threw herself into a low chair by the window.

So this was coming home. And the only person who seemed glad to see her was the old housekeeper, and the only room where she felt at home or would ever feel at peace had been prepared for her by the man whom she had thought false and whom she had sworn to forget.

The door opened and Dudley came in. He brought a chair close to hers.

"Do you like it, Queen Daisy?"

"This room? I think it is perfect—delicious."

A shadow crossed his face.

"I did not mean this room. But I am glad you like it."

"Oh, you meant Froghambury?"

"Yes."

"They do not like me, Dudley. They will never like me."

"You mistake. They are shy—nervous—awkward."

"No; they are cross, and they mean to be so. But, Dudley, I do not care; I have you."

He bent over and kissed her.

"Do you regret?"

"Regret! no. A thousand times, no."

"You are generous, Margot. And I feared you might think I had been mean when you saw what reception they gave you."

"No; that is not your fault. But, Dudley, we will not let them be cross. You and I are two——"

"One you mean."

"Well, one; but we have the strength of two, and we will win them over. Then, too, we always have this room to come away to, and where we can be happy."

Valentin again. Why was he always crossing her brain this evening? The dressing-bell rang,

and Margaret put on a simple white dress and went down.

"Edward, give Margaret your arm."

"And where will you sit, Margaret? Here by Lilly? you can see out over the park so. Will that do?"

"That will do nicely," laughed Margaret, as she seated herself by Lilly. But she understood now she was to be nothing in the house.

After Margaret's little answer silence reigned supreme.

She looked up surprised, but she found they were all busy with their soup. Margaret began to wonder if she had said anything wrong, or if she had laid the wrong stress or accent on "nicely." Just then she caught the glimmer of a smile on Miss Wygram's face. Probably she had seen other victims going through this same probation at the family dinner; or probably it only was that Mrs. Vane was cross with her for having married Dudley.

Well, she would show at any rate that she did not bear malice.

"What a curious old house it is," said she, and they all looked up, surprised. If a volcano had burst there could not have been more dismay.

But Margaret did not care. "There are some beautiful bits of old carving all about."

"Yes," said Dudley, but under protest, as it were.

"I went on a little exploring expedition, Mrs. Vane, on my way down."

"Eh?"

"And such beautiful pictures in the hall. Some of them must be very valuable. Are they not, Edward?"

"I don't know. I dare say they may be."

"I must find out all about them. Dudley, you must tell me."

"I really don't know."

"Not know! Ah! you have not lived in this house very much perhaps. But *not know!* Does no one know? Perhaps that explains the uncared-for state I found some of them in."

"Will you have some beef, Margaret?"

"No, thank you. I think nothing is so sad as a fine old picture going to decay. Don't you, Miss Wygram?"

"Oh, I do; I do indeed."

"It can't speak or murmur; it touches us by its faded beauty, but it is quite dumb and helpless; and then, as it gets more faded and more

degraded, living envy comes and laughs over it, while the spirit of the dead painter seems to sigh over it in vain."

"You are very artistic in your tastes, Margaret," said Mrs. Vane, with an air of resignation.

"Life would not be much without art, would it?" said she.

But they were busy over their beef, and her words fell on heedless ears.

"Dudley, you are very silent to-night," said Margaret, with annoyance in her voice.

"Am I? Oh, well! we had to make an early start of it. I am rather done."

"Scotland was so beautiful, Lilly."

"Ah! I suppose so."

Another silence, longer, worse than any of the former.

"Your house was burnt down, wasn't it, Mrs. Vane?" asked Margaret at last, in despair.

"The lodge? Oh yes; it was."

"How dreadful."

Just then the servants left the room.

"Margaret," said Mrs. Vane, a little severely, "we never talk before the servants."

"Why not?" she laughed, in utter innocence.

"We find it best."

"But how bad for them."

"Why?"

"They must think you so stupid, or so cross. They must indeed think you have not an idea between you."

"I cannot help that."

"And then it must be so dull, and sets them such a bad example."

Then the servants came back.

"But tell me about the fire."

Mrs. Vane was too angry to speak.

"We were all away," said Dudley; "only an old man and his wife in it, who took very good care of themselves. But they did not stop the fire."

"So then——"

"So then it was burnt to the ground, and then my mother came to live here, till it could be built up again."

"And why wasn't it built up again?"

Dudley coloured.

"Well, you see, she got all the plans and estimates, but then Uncle Gilbert fell ill——"

"The long and short of it was, I preferred this," said Mrs. Vane, looking rather triumphantly across the room at old Douglas.

"And now when will it be built up again?" asked Margaret.

"I suppose I shall have to do it," said Dudley.

"You and I might go and live there," said Margaret.

Dudley stared at her, and so did they all. She understood she had said something dreadful, and she was delighted, for she was getting cross too.

The meal progressed, and the silence grew, for Margaret was too weary to make any more efforts. The candles made a cheerful light through the room, and the dessert looked pretty and luxurious on the table. But it was only a mockery of comfort. In no heart was there any comfort at all.

Afterwards, when they were in the drawing-room, Lilly took up her work, and Miss Wygram followed suit. Mrs. Vane became absorbed in a book, and, after offering another to Margaret, thought she had done her duty. So Margaret was left to observe them all, undisturbed.

"Do you work all the evening, Lilly?" asked she, at last.

"Yes. But it will soon be time to go to bed."

"Oh yes. You sleep immensely here, I dare say?"

"Yes; I think we do."

"Mrs. Vane is asleep now, I think."

"Oh yes; she always sleeps in the evening."

"Don't you play or anything?"

"No; it would wake her."

"Or not at any game?"

"No; it would disturb the others."

Later, Dudley did ask Margaret to try the piano; but no one else evinced any interest about the experiment, or thanked her when she had finished playing, so she understood it had been solely proposed for her own amusement. This was flat.

Then having looked around, and having seen different members of the family in different stages of dulness, stupidity, and somnambulism; having discovered carefully also that there were no family prayers, and that she would not be hurting any one's feelings, she said she would like to go upstairs, and she said a general good-night.

The answers were mostly indistinct, so she glided away, and Dudley followed her to light her candle.

"Dudley, take me away. I cannot bear it."

He looked at her amazed.

"What is it? what can't you bear? This is temper, isn't it? or what do you mean?"

He really thought it had not been disagreeable; quiet, of course, but in the country must it not be so?

"I can live anywhere alone. I can live anywhere with you. But I cannot, cannot bear this."

He took her upstairs, he tried to listen, he tried to understand. There, standing at the open window, looking out on the silvery moonlight that lay on hill, tree-top, and quiet valley, he tried to calm her.

"Believe me, wait a little, and you will soon like it all right."

"Like it! Oh, I shall die of it. I am quite different already."

And again—

"I feel as if I ought to be dead, or half dead, and then I might bear it."

"Do you give up so soon? I thought you and I were to win them over?"

Then she burst into tears, and compunction unnerved her.

"Perhaps it was my fault. Perhaps I did not understand them. Perhaps they did mean to be kind. Dudley, I will try to manage better to-morrow."

CHAPTER XV.

Believe not those that lands possess,
And shining heaps of useless ore,
The only lords of happiness.

The next day Dudley took Margaret all over the house. Her admiration for the pictures and the old china and for the different artistic objects that met her everywhere knew no bounds, but her enthusiasm was sadly damped at seeing how little all these things were cared for, how dust had gathered on them, how the pictures needed care, and how oddly the china was pushed away in strange impossible corners. She herself discovered two or three valuable pieces in a curious old cabinet.

"There is work before me indeed, Dudley," said she, warming to her occupation.

"Yes," said he.

But it was in a very doubtful tone, for would

Mrs. Vane let Margaret touch these things. Yet, in fact, they were Margaret's.

"I shall make the house look quite a different place."

"Yes," said he, again; this time with a yawn, for this rubbishy old china was nothing to him, and as for the pictures, they might be valuable, but they were not amusing.

"You must come and see my pictures," said he.

"Yes," said she enthusiastically; "that I will. Where are they?"

"In the servants' hall. They are put there till I come to hang them up."

"Let us come now."

He was pleased at her readiness, and smiled as she came close to him and put down the duster with which she had been dusting the china.

They were standing in the gallery that ran all round the hall; great arches tapered up to the ceiling; through them you could look down into the great hall beneath.

Dudley was leaning lazily on the balustrade watching Margaret. Now, as she came close to him, he threw his arm round her.

"Queen Daisy, I hope you will be happy here."

She was touched, and smiling, answered bravely—

"I am sure I shall."

She did not say she had been awake all night, trembling at the bitter revelations that had come to her, absolutely afraid of the dreary outlook the future presented to her.

"Don't you see it all, Queen Daisy? Don't you understand now how it was that—you hooked me so easily?"

"No; unless it is that we are so different."

"Not quite; except that I had never seen any one like you before. This life was so dull, and you seemed like an angel; so bright, so merry, as if you must make fun wherever you went."

"And now that you have caged the bird, and brought me here, Dudley, you must be kind to me."

There was a little shake in her voice as she said it, and Dudley kissed her for answer.

Just then the rustle of a dress was heard, and at the end of the corridor they saw the receding figure of Mrs. Vane.

Margaret flushed indignantly.

"Would she listen? would she do such a thing?"

Dudley too coloured.

"I do not know. I don't——"

"Stay!" said Margaret. "There she is."

For Mrs. Vane had entered the hall below.

Lilly was reading in a great arm-chair by the fire.

"Quite sickening, I declare!" said Mrs. Vane, loud enough for them to hear. "That German girl is kissing your brother, and he has his arm round her, and it is like the servants, really they should not do it in public."

"So," said Margaret aloud, from above, "we are to have no love-making in this model establishment. Come, Dudley, let us go to the servants' hall."

Dudley was quite ready; they went together.

"Oh, Dudley," she exclaimed, going down the broad oak stairs looking at the pictures as she went, "I do wish poor Sir Gilbert were alive."

"Why?"

"Because I am sure he would have told me all about these things; none of you seem to know. But he must have cared about them, and it would have been so nice to have had somebody."

"Come and see my pictures."

There on the way were Mrs. Simeon and Douglas, the butler, who came out from respective doors to greet Margaret. She wished them both good morning, and said she had come to see Mr. Dudley's pictures.

"How will it all end, I wonder?" asked Mrs. Simeon of Douglas, lifting up her hands towards him when they had passed.

"I don't know. We ought to manage to turn out the old lady somehow now, I think. But she's a very tough one to manage."

"Oh, so those are the pictures, are they?"

This was Margaret's exclamation at the sight of Dudley's favourite works of art.

Horses, and dogs, and sporting characters in different stages of excitement and of physical development were the subjects of the collection.

Dudley grew eloquent as he explained.

"Look here! Look how magnificently he takes this gate. And look at the hounds: heads down, sterns up. Did you ever see such painting? I am going to have them all hung up in the study."

"In the study?"

They went through them all.

"Going to Cover," "Unkennelling the Fox-

hounds," "Breaking Cover," and then "The Chase" itself.

"Did you ever see anything so noble, so inspiring?" asked Dudley, catching some of Margaret's words for his purpose.

"No," said Margaret, supposing she was very stupid.

Then there was "Making a Cast at a Fault." This took Dudley a long time to explain. Margaret was obliged to sit down while she listened. Then came "Digging for the Fox," and then at last the end of the Tragic History, "The Death of the Fox."

"Poor thing! Why do they let them kill it? Those foremost hounds are brutes."

How Dudley laughed at her.

Margaret was glad when it was all over, and then Dudley proposed that she should come and explore the park.

"Oh yes; she would like that," and she ran off to get her hat like a child.

"You must take me out hunting," said she, as she settled herself in the pony carriage by Dudley's side.

"We must have some rides first," said he.

"Except Schock, my father's pony, I have never ridden anything."

Then he took her all over the park. How glorious it was. The young shoots were just bursting; the tender light of spring seemed to be on everything; the bracken was just uncurling, the old trees were unbending in their stern majesty, and were coming out in their new garb for the summer.

How peaceful everything seemed, and how glad in the universal peace. The sunlight lying on grassy slope and on the barks of the trees seemed to Margaret like God's smile resting on his works. Why could not Dudley understand her thoughts? why did a hidden and terrible sense of loneliness oppress her all at once?

If Dudley were not one with it all, how could she love him properly? or failing him, how could she love it all without him? To be independent of human sympathy seemed an impossibility to Margaret.

"How proud you must be of all this," said she, presently. "It is a nice old place, isn't it? Sir Gilbert must have loved it."

"He did. I almost wonder he left it to me."

"Why?"

"He thought me a failure."

Margaret would not let the thought that Sir Gilbert was right have its way.

"You will not be that, Dudley, now?"

"A failure! no. But—look at the deer;" he pointed with his whip to the startled herd as he spoke. "He was absurd. What am I to do? I will live here and keep the place together, and enjoy myself."

"Is that all?"

"Of course he had to work, to buy the place back, and to leave money to keep it in the family. But now that it is here, what am I to do?"

"He would have liked you to go into Parliament, and to be something. After all, Dudley, what is the good of being some one if you are not something?"

"I don't know. But I know I had rather a precious sight be some one than something."

"Have you any neighbours here? any one to speak to?"

"Neighbours! Why should we want neighbours? No; there is the clergyman. But he's dying, they say, and then we shall have old Tudor, though that seems a robbery."

"Why?"

"I heard it afterwards, through Mr. Mortimer. My Uncle Gilbert promised him the living if he would stop our marrying. He thought he had stopped it when he took me away and you would not see me; so the next presentation of it was made over to him."

"And was that all?"

"All what?"

"Was there no other threat, no other punishment, if you married me?"

"No. Was not that enough?"

After that Margaret was silent for a long time. She was trying to make it all out. What should she do with herself here always? What could she make of Dudley? What would Dudley make of her? Often in the honeymoon it had seemed dull and dreadful; now too they had come to the end of their conversation.

"I must learn all about ferrets and rats," said she half to herself.

"Oh yes; rare sport that," chimed in Dudley. "And then there are the terriers. You must come and see them."

"Oh yes."

They were going down a steep hill in the park then; dark pine trees grew on either side of the

path, and at the bottom gleamed the water of the lake.

"How still, how strange," said she.

"Yes. It wants cleaning out."

"It looks infinite. It is like eternity."

She shuddered involuntarily. Would eternity be as dark, as comfortless, as mysterious as that?

"Cold, my gal?"

"So, Dudley, you have no neighbours?"

"Neighbours! let me see. There is Mrs. Kingsford. You might go and see her some day. And there is Miss Warburton, a great friend of my mother's. I think the Chesters are our nearest neighbours."

"Who are they?"

"Lord and Lady Chester; great swells. Too grand to take any notice of us. She was Lady Lorraine something or other."

This was not encouraging.

"But there is a neighbourhood, I suppose?"

"Oh yes; one sees it at the Hunt Ball, or if any one comes of age——"

"Why didn't you come of age?"

"I did; last year. I was twenty-five last year."

"And when else does one see it?"

"Sometimes some one gives a dance in the summer. Dances are horrid things."

Margaret's heart sank within her. What was she to do? Would not poverty, the direst, the most abject, be ever so much better than this dull state?

"You will have a nice easy time of it here," said Dudley.

"Shall I?"

"Yes; my mother does all the housekeeping, and orders everything, and sees to the poor, and all that, so you will have nothing to do but enjoy yourself."

Enjoy herself. How was she to do that? She, the most energetic, the most universally active mind that one could well find, she with her delicate artistic sensitive nature suddenly to be caged up in a Castle of Indolence, with no one but sons of the soil. Truly the contrast was painful; truly the conflict between the will and the power was terrible.

That afternoon she set herself in all meekness to understand the characters of the people with whom she had to live.

They were soon summed up, and later she found no reason to alter her opinions.

Mrs. Vane, a selfish, jealous woman, who had made up her mind to hate her.

Lilly, an awkward, raw girl, who had evidently been always so thrown back upon herself that now there was hardly anything to draw out.

Uncle Ted, a cypher, who seemed hopelessly indolent, for he seldom spoke, and if he did it was too indistinctly to be understood. Yet Margaret was convinced it was indolence, for if he happened to be thirsty, or to require anything, he could speak plainly enough.

Mary Wygram, the casual visitor, soured, but anxious to conciliate those in authority.

Dudley therefore only remained. He must furnish sympathy, interest, energy, life; Dudley must be her centre, her anchor. Well, was he not her husband?

After she had arrived at all these conclusions, after her attempts at conversation and at conciliation had all turned out to be in vain, she went out to the hall-door to breathe the fresh air. Bitter disappointment oppressed her heart; a sense of failure weighed her down. She looked out on the wide scene of undulating ground, on the shadows of the trees, on the glorious prospect of noble hill and quiet vale, and—hated it all.

Then, as she stood there, she saw something winding slowly up the hill; whether it were cart or carriage she could not see, but it was something of exterior life. She waited, watching to see what it would turn out. It was only a cart; nothing more. She was turning away disappointed, thinking she would find a book and take it to her room, when she saw the cart stop, and a great animal jumped out.

"Why," exclaimed she,—and absolutely her own heart stood still,—"it is Fritz!"

She called him aloud. The faithful dog stopped —he was trembling all over with excitement—he wanted to make sure it was Margaret—he stood there with ears erect, and tail down—looking. Then she went forward to meet him, and in a moment more he was with her, covering her with caresses, almost threatening to knock her down in the intensity of his joy.

"And so they sent you, did they, my poor old fellow—they sent you to me?"

She kissed him as she talked to him, and with his coming the landscape seemed to have changed for her.

"What walks we will have, old fellow. You'll like it better than Hans Place."

And then inspiration seized her, and at once she threw off the chains that had been galling her.

"That was not life," said she to herself. "Fritz and I will go and enjoy ourselves. We can't be unhappy any more."

So Fritz had some dinner, and then he and his young mistress went away for a tearing walk together, neither knew where nor did either care.

All among the bracken and down the hills they ran, in among the tall grass, and pushing through the thick underwood. The rabbits started up at their coming, and the startled deer scoured the plain in terror. Fritz and Margaret only laughed. Down to the silent pool they went, and Fritz tried its dark depths and drew back in alarm; then he too looked on wonderingly, looked at a lazy heron that winged its lazy flight away, and seemed to wonder with Margaret if it were infinitude.

No wonder she sat down on the bank and put her arm round his great neck; no wonder she said, as through his faithful devotion, her love for Nature began to come back to her:

"We are all right now, Fritz. Nothing can matter very much as long as I have you. Nothing

can really make me unhappy any more. There is poetry and sympathy and laughter too in your dear old brown eyes. What jokes we will have, when no one else can manage a laugh at all."

No wonder she was late for dinner; no wonder they were cross; ay, even Dudley too. But what did it matter?

"Is man to be a slave to his food?" said Margaret.

And though she started the four subjects of conversation which she had carefully prepared,—viz., the weather, the newspaper, the neighbourhood, and the garden,—and though they one and all failed, she did not care so much, for had she not her old friend Fritz at hand? Some one loved her at Froghambury besides her husband after all. That evening the entry in her diary was not about the place, the house, her new relations, or her new hopes and schemes; but only, "Fritz came."

CHAPTER XVI.

The trees are cloth'd with leaves, the fields with grass,
The blossoms blow, the birds on bushes sing,
And Nature has accomplish'd all the spring.—*Dryden.*

Certainly Mrs. Vane was not the most desirable person to live with. She had no idea of making herself pleasant. If it pleased her to say a thing, she would say it, but she would not go to the expense of saying it for other people's amusement She was wholly wrapped up in herself. If there were but one window to a room, and she were one of many in that room, yet she would take it all up as though it were her prerogative and leave every one else in darkness. Her portly frame made an excellent screen. Or if it were cold, and there were but one fire in the gallery, straightway she would seat herself right in front of that fire, precluding the approach of any other person, and leave every one else to shiver in the distance. She always seemed to forget that any one else

existed for this world's comforts except herself. Other people there were, but they were mostly slaves, and if they were not slaves then she had nothing to do with them.

Nor did she seem to have any sympathy with any one. Her daughter was consigned to a distant limbo of indifference, where she had to take care of herself as best she might; Uncle Teddy was only addressed to be snubbed; Miss Wygram perhaps received most of her favours, but they were but crumbs. Dudley, in old days, was the favourite; chiefly because he was the eldest, and also because he had always been so delicate and weak; but now he had grievously sinned in marrying Margaret. He too was relegated to a distance. To bring another woman into the family was a grievous crime. Women Mrs. Vane had always hated.

The discovery was not long being made apparent to Margaret. At first she tried diligently to win the friendship of the members of the family; for Dudley's sake she tried to amuse and please them; failing that, she tried to give them wider interests than any they seemed to have; utterly failing here, and finding too that her company was neither desired or

missed, she began to look about for interests for herself outside of them.

It was very hard; it was a bitter lesson that the warm-hearted girl had to learn, but she had Dudley and she had Fritz, and through them she studied and learned to love the wonderful and ever-stirring world of Nature about her.

The household were surprised at her long absences, they wondered what she did with herself; Mrs. Vane was hardly pleased that Margaret should be so magnificently indifferent to her opinion or her society. She had thought the "German girl" would have been her slave; but no; there she was as proud, as smiling, as ready for a laugh, a story, or a sarcasm as on the very first day she had entered the house. Her spirit was not the least subdued.

So thought Mrs. Vane; but she was wrong. The dull, sad, solitary life was working a change surely enough in the girl; for she was solitary. Dudley could not understand her; he might try to sympathize, and though Margaret would take the will for the deed in all gratitude, yet the more they were together the more apparent was the difference between them. His attempts at sympathy often jarred rather than consoled, and

Margaret learnt daily more and more that she was alone.

But there was Nature still, and that and Fritz saved her. What long walks they had together. In the early morning, brushing the fresh dew from the grass, watching the deepening sunlight, listening to the busy twittering of the birds in their nests, watching the speckled trout, making pictures in the clouds, or watching the swift, darting flights of the swallow, many happy hours glided away. Or would she tend the flowers in the garden, and bestow here a pruning hand, or there a sheltering prop, still Fritz walked gravely beside her, and seemed to understand it all.

But best he loved it when, snug at Margaret's feet among the cushions, he could lay in the boat on the lake, and watch and dream; then she too, pretending to read, or at least often holding a book before her, to secure her freedom from interruption, she too would watch the changing sky and waving trees, and she too would dream. But her dreams were tinged with sadness now; they were best pushed away. They only told her the same old story: the gradual dispersion of noble ambitions, the gradual fading of roseate hopes. Life was limited, prosaic,

and uninteresting. At times she would think she could not bear to live in this narrow field, this barren soil any longer. Daily she would say to herself, even as she strove to smother the rebellion in her heart, "I was not meant for it. This is not life."

One day, idly rocking herself in the boat, she perceived a child coming towards her through the trees. The wild hyacinths made a blue carpet beneath her feet; she seemed to walk wrapped in a sunbeam. The sight of a living human thing, that might laugh, or that might—might in time love her, was a glad thought. The child came slowly; it was picking up sticks. It did not see Margaret. Such a pretty child! with dark hair and blue eyes. It sang a little song to itself as it worked.

Fritz pricked up his ears as he watched, then he wagged his tail when Margaret told him to be quiet, as if he quite understood the joke. The silence and the beauty of the scene seemed to affect the child too. It put away its sticks, and it sat down on the grass; then began to pick a nosegay.

"Blue-bells, and enemies; and what else shall I have? Come here, ma'am, on your tall stalk!

what do they call you, I wonder? And here is a daisy, and here is a tall yellow Miss. Come along too; we shall all go home to granny. And oh, my! there's a lady in the boat, and——"

Margaret laughed.

"Won't you give me your nosegay, little girl? Ah! who am I? do you know?"

"Oh, ma'am, please don't tell of me, please don't tell Mrs. Vane. We are not allowed to come here."

"Why not?"

"She says we might break the trees or steal something. But granny and I are very poor, and she did want a little wood so, and we were quite out."

"And what's your name?"

"Polly."

"What else?"

"Polly Pringle."

"And where does your granny live?"

"There, ma'am, just below the park; you might see the smoke if there was any fire, but there won't be till I come home."

"Suppose you take me there?" said Margaret, springing up. The name of granny sounded nice and human.

"I musn't take the sticks, musn't I?"

"Yes. Shall I carry some too?"

The child thought the lady must be mad.

"Maybe, ma'am, are you the new lady at the great house!"

"Yes, Polly, I am; and you may come and pick sticks as often as you like. There, I have given you leave. No; Fritz won't hurt you."

So the three walked away to see granny, a dear old woman with white cap, and red handkerchief pinned over her cotton gown, and Margaret found, as she talked, that life held duties for her yet, and that there were friends still whom she could befriend, and sorrows which even she could heal.

"And may I have the nosegay now?" asked she of the child, as she turned away at last to go home.

The child blushed so prettily as she gave it that Margaret stooped to kiss her.

"Thank you, childie, thank you for the flowers."

At luncheon that day Margaret did not fail to recount her adventure.

"My dear Margaret," said Mrs. Vane, when she had heard her to the end, "of course if you

have told the child to come, she must come ; but the old woman is a beggar, and a very bad old woman. At least the son was bad. And they are not proper people at all to go and see. Mrs. Simeon has a list, if you want to go district-visiting."

"No ; I don't. I want to go to my friends, and to go where I am most wanted. After all, I had better perhaps go to all those who are *not* on Mrs. Simeon's list, for they will want looking after sadly."

Afterwards Dudley said—

"Margaret, don't always argue with my mother ; do think alike sometimes."

"I wish we could."

"She likes to reign, so let her."

"She shall ; but I cannot be debarred from all occupation. I must do right, when it comes to me."

"The parish has been neglected, I know. But now I suppose we shall see great things, for the poor old man is dead."

"The clergyman ?"

"Yes ; died last night. And I suppose Mr. Tudor will be here at once."

"I am glad."

"Why? I thought you did not like him?"

"No; no more I do. He always has his eye so fixed on the main chance; but, Dudley, he has conversation."

Afterwards, alone in her artistically furnished little room, how she wished to alter everything about Froghambury, to make it even as her own little nest was.

"It might be so beautiful; the grounds, the park, the house are all beautiful; it is just the stupid people that spoil all. Man mars Nature here certainly."

Yet from that day she struggled bravely with her life. It was as though the child with the flowers had roused her to a sense of what she could do for others; she often went to the old woman, and thence by degrees the circle widened, and soon there was not a cottage in the village where she was not a welcome and honoured visitor. Perhaps this did not entirely satisfy her, but it was something. She went into the subject of the improvement of the poor with enthusiasm. Compulsory education, school-boards, their wilful ignorance, emigration as a means of helping the agricultural classes, no theme came amiss to her.

Then too she looked for wider sympathy. Dudley had directed her to go and call on Miss Warburton, and she had gone. But a stiff and starched lady had looked at her through a pair of spectacles, as she sat on the edge of her chair, and talked of the weather, so after a visit of five minutes Margaret withdrew and never repeated the experiment. Miss Warburton was Mrs. Vane's friend.

Then, being bent on discovery, she had gone on to Mrs. Kingsford, an old lady confined to two rooms, of which one was a conservatory, which Margaret admired at once.

"They keep me alive," said the old lady, laughing, as she pointed to her flowers, "and I keep them alive; so it is a Mutual Help Society."

She stayed long talking to the cheerful old dame, and then, when she rose, Mrs. Kingsford pressed flowers upon her.

"Just touch the bell, would you, my dear? Ah, that's it! Thank you. Look, Preston,"—this to the neat little maid who answered the summons,—"get Lady Vane a Lamarque, and, let me see, a Gloire de Rosamine; and do you know the Emperor of Morocco? have one or two, do; and there's Forsyth's Banksia; I want you

to know that. Oh, then my Ficus. I must introduce you; the best and quickest growing little creeper I know; rather capricious, though; you must have some cuttings. Preston, how awkward you are! Yes—now—there."

At last Margaret said good-bye.

"But you must go and see Matta, my woman at the farm; oh, indeed you must. She will amuse you."

Indeed she did. Matta had the largest heart of any woman alive for all created things. Up at day-break, and sleeping only when nothing was wanted, she had more animate beings dependent on her than could have been imagined possible for any one who was not a keeper at the Zoological Gardens.

Dogs, cats, horses, turkeys, ducks, geese, pigeons, fowls innumerable, a snake, a hedgehog, pigs, a squirrel. What else besides? The list swelled daily.

"Why, you have a regular Noah's ark here!" said Margaret, as she drove up.

"Worse, ma'am! much worse! But come and see them, do."

Margaret found as she went home that her horizon was certainly widening.

The spring was deepening into summer now, and with the beauty of all around Margaret too let peace pass into her heart by degrees. She tried to stifle hopes and aspirations, wants and needs; she tried to live, as she had said first she would do, forgetting herself, thinking only of Dudley.

Only, alas! always just when she was at her best Dudley was left behind. He understood nothing of how she had to stoop to get to his level; he had begun to think, thanks to Mrs. Vane, that Margaret's cleverness and Margaret's love of art was all affectation. At such times she would have recourse to her out-of-door life again; and soon it became a sure sign that Margaret was "offended" because she was missing. Any other word but "offended" would have been truer, but that suited them best.

There had been one or two rides with Dudley, but it was almost too hot; there was not much to do.

On the hottest evenings Margaret sat out in the arcade with a lamp. Who liked might come to her. The drawing-room she abjured. When it was cold or damp she went up to her sitting-room.

One afternoon she was sitting there, poring over a book,—often, if it had not been that Fritz wanted a walk, she would have stayed in all day,—when Dudley burst in, in extreme excitement.

"I say, Margaret, the Chesters have called."

"Well, what of that? I don't know them."

"No. But do come down. Nobody knows what to say to them."

"Is Lady Lorraine there?"

"Yes; she is Lady Chester."

"I like her name. Were you like that—towzled hair and dirty boots, eh?"

"Yes."

Margaret laughed.

"You hadn't a ferret handy, had you?"

"No."

"We might take Snap to show her."

"So we might. I'll go and fetch him."

He really went, and Margaret could not forbear a laugh.

"Ah! this is Lady Vane, I am sure," said a pleasant voice; and almost before she was aware Margaret found her hand taken, and a bright young face, with kind eyes, was looking into hers. "My husband, Lady Vane. We heard

you had come home, so Chester drove me over; I thought you might like to see a neighbour."

"Are you Lady Lorraine?" asked Margaret, looking at her, and still keeping her hand.

"Yes," said the other, laughing.

"I have heard of you before."

Both Lord Chester and his wife laughed.

For the moment all Margaret's pain and loneliness seemed to be over. Then she became aware of the Vane family sitting in a circle looking on.

"How good of you to come, Lady Chester."

"Not at all. I wanted to see you. I have heard of your acting, and of all sorts of things."

And had not Margaret heard of Lady Lorraine —from the old people in the village, from Mrs. Kingsford? Who had not told her of Lady Lorraine?

"Your park is looking lovely, Lady Vane," said Lord Chester.

"Yes; the trees are beautiful. I am never tired of looking at them. Is your park like this?"

"No; Carlingsford is—— You must come and see it. But it is not like this."

Then Dudley appeared at the window.

"Margaret, I have brought Snap."

"Ah, so you have," said she, good-humouredly.

"Lady Lorraine—I beg your pardon, Lady Chester——"

"No; call me my name if you like."

"I was going to say, would you like to step outside and look at the view?"

"Willingly," said the other.

Then Dudley was despatched to order tea in the arcade; frown as Mrs. Vane would, who considered tea an innovation. And then Lord Chester went to look at the fish with Dudley, and Margaret and her visitor were alone.

"I have heard of you from Mr. Mortimer," said Lady Chester. "He came home loud in your praises."

"Yes. He was with us a great deal. He has gone to America, I believe."

"Yes. But not for long. And you—do you like your home?"

"I! Oh, it is beautiful. But—no; I cannot tell stories, and yet I feel as if I must tell you if you ask me; and yet I ought not to tell you, knowing you so little. But I have never lived in the country before."

"You are so different from the rest. I keep

longing to ask how do you come to be here? Of course it is dull. I have gone through it all myself."

"You have?"

"Yes."

Lady Lorraine flicked a wasp away with her parasol as she spoke.

"How do you mean?"

"*Le monde est le livre des femmes*, I believe, and, failing that, book-life is dull. It is dreadful at first for a woman to be thrown back upon herself. One's husband may be charming, but often he is not there, or even he sometimes does not understand everything, or there is no congenial society within reach, or—oh, Lady Vane, I cannot explain, but there are a hundred things——"

"I know."

"But you, Lady Vane, are, I dare say, full of resources——"

"Yes; but one wants some one sometimes to take an interest. Lady Lorraine, will you come and see my sitting-room?"

Lady Chester followed her, laughing. Here was her ideal woman; an impressionable, artistic soul; a very angel, only still "not too good for human nature's daily food."

"What a grand old house it is," said she aloud.

"Yes; is it not? But you must like my little nest."

Like it! Lorraine went into wild expressions of delight.

"A nest indeed for an artist soul. You paint here, I am sure! You do everything here. I should. Who furnished this? not the Vanes?"

"My mother."

An awkward blush rose to her brow as she said it, for she knew it was Valentin.

"Is there anything against her mother?" thought Lorraine, as she saw it. "I do not care. She is a clever woman anyhow."

Afterwards they had tea under the arcade, and even Dudley became at his ease under the genial influence and bright smiles of Lady Lorraine.

"You will come to see us at Carlingsford, will you not?" said she, as they bade good-bye at length.

"Yes, yes. Indeed we will."

"Mind, you have promised, Vane," said Chester, as he took the reins in his hand.

"You and I must be great friends," said Lady Lorraine, as she shook hands with Margaret on the steps.

"You are my good angel already," said Margaret, enthusiastically.

"Good-bye; and to you too, Fritz," said Lord Chester.

She stayed watching the receding carriage as long as it was in sight.

"Dudley, you said they were grand. And you never told me she was so pretty."

"I didn't know," said he.

"I am so glad to have seen her," said Lady Lorraine to Lord Chester. "And how beautiful she is!"

"After all, women think a lot more of looks than men do," said her husband. "You don't hear me rave like that."

"Because you are afraid I shall be jealous, that is all. But, Chester, you must help me to be kind to her. It must be an awful life for her there."

"I wonder why she married him?"

END OF VOL. II.